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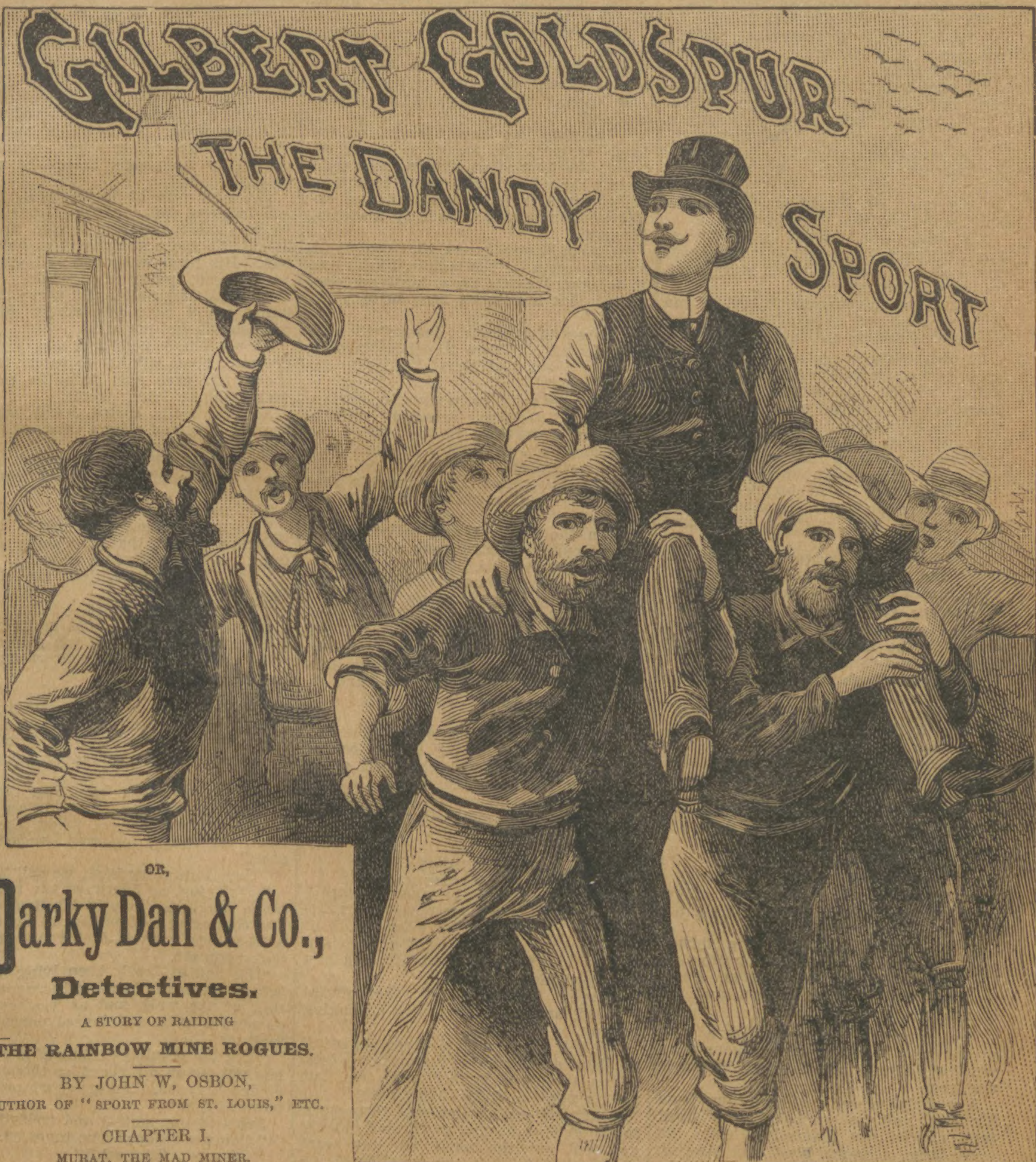
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OR,
**Darky Dan & Co.,
Detectives.**

A STORY OF RAIDING
THE RAINBOW MINE ROGUES.

BY JOHN W. OSBON,
AUTHOR OF "SPORT FROM ST. LOUIS," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

MURAT, THE MAD MINER.

The night was cloudy, the hour late.
Flying sand obscured the face of the full

"THREE CHEERS FOR THE DANDY SPORT!" CRIED JUBAL STRONG, WILDLY
SWINGING HIS HAT.

moon, and the wind howled dismally through the foothills.

The streets of Red Gulch, a lively mining settlement on the banks of Black Bear Creek, seemed almost deserted. But an occasional belated pedestrian was to be seen; and, with the exception of two lights, the camp was shrouded in gloom.

Of these two beacons, one shone from the open doorway of the Gold-Bar Palace, a hotel and all-night resort. The second came from the front window of Sailor Jake's Haven, a rival establishment, on the opposite bank of the winding stream.

The beclouded moon had passed the zenith, when from the northward, down the rough stage trail, there came a stylishly-dressed horseman, leading a pack animal.

Abruptly drawing rein in front of the Gold-Bar Palace, the rider uttered the hail:

"Hallo! hallo! the house!"

The response was immediate, for from the hotel office and saloon stepped a tall, black-bearded man of middle age, well dressed, and of prosperous appearance.

This was the mayor of Red Gulch.

"Hallo! hallo" he responded, looking askance at the horseman. "What's the trouble, stranger?"

"I want to find the mayor or the marshal, and a doctor," the horseman replied.

"Wal, you're quickly suited, stranger, for I'm the may'r—I'm Jubal Strong."

The horseman started.

"That is fortunate!" he exclaimed. "It will save time."

"My name, Mr. Strong, is Gilbert Goldspur, and I am from Paradise Bar."

"At dusk I was attacked by a madman, but overpowered him, and he is here upon my pack. I fear that he is badly hurt, so want a doctor."

This terse announcement created no little surprise and incredulity among the rapidly-assembling habitues of the hotel.

Gilbert Goldspur, as he called himself, sprang from his saddle and led the pack animal to the lighted space, where a single glance was sufficient to verify, in part, his statement.

Bound upon the horse was a man of stalwart proportions. His hair and beard were gray, long and unkempt. A knife and revolvers were in his belt, and a rifle hung at his back. His clothing was of buckskin, with rawhide boots, and bearskin cap.

A rude gag was between his powerful jaws, and the head had fallen forward until the chin rested upon his breast.

"By the great horned toad! Sport, you've got the critter foul, shore enough!" the mayor cried. "We'll git him down and carry him inside."

"His eyes are shut, and he looks more dead than alive."

"And the doctor?" Goldspur asked.

"Doc Early is inside, playin' bank. Here, Bill, you go fetch him."

At this command, a burly, black-whiskered member of the group hurried to the hotel.

"Now, sir," the mayor continued, addressing Goldspur, "if you'll have the kindness—"

"Lead the way, sir; I am ready," the sport interrupted, lifting the captive from the horse and holding him in his arms as one would a child. "We'll act now, and pow-wow later."

Thus enjoined, Jubal Strong turned and entered the hotel, passing through the office and into the barroom. Goldspur followed with his burden, and the crowd brought up the rear.

The apparently senseless man was placed upon a table. His weapons were removed, and he was relieved of bonds and gag.

A long sigh of relief at once came from his lips, and he worked his cramped jaws slowly and painfully. Then his eyes—large, deep-set, black and piercing—suddenly opened, and he closely scanned the surrounding faces.

No sign of recognition—no glance of intelligence—crossed the grim old visage.

His gaze faltered, then sought the floor, and he struggled to a sitting posture.

"Are you wounded?" asked the mayor.

"Yes," stolidly.

"Where?"

"My head."

"To-day?"

"No; years ago. Redskins did it. My pards escaped. There were three of us—miners."

"Who are you? What is your name?"

"Men call me Murat, the Mad Miner."

Jubal Strong started, glanced at his companions, and nodded his head significantly.

"He's ther Mad Miner, shore as fate!" one exclaimed, with an apprehensive glance at the powerful frame of the unfortunate.

"And your pards—do you recall their names?" the mayor continued.

Murat slowly shook his head. Then, in a sudden access of passion, he cried:

"Not now!—not now! They were false! They were treacherous! They betrayed me, to rob me of my gold!"

With that he lapsed into sullen silence, which the mayor's most adroit questioning failed to break.

Doctor Early's appearance was not long delayed. A careful examination of the Mad Miner failed to discover any injury more serious than a few simple scratches and bruises, and the physician so announced.

"The man has been wounded on the head—scalped, in fact," he observed. "But, the hurt is an old one and completely healed. His present condition, aside from the aberration, is due to exhaustion, induced no doubt by a violent struggle."

"I wish, Mayor Strong, that you would secure a room for the man and keep him under guard a few days, for I am convinced that his reason may be fully restored."

"I'll see to it at once, doctor," the official agreed. "There has long been a mystery about Mad Murat I'd like to see cleared up."

"You may count upon my co-operation, gentlemen," Goldspur asserted. "There is indeed a mystery in the life of the man, and he is one who I feel has been bitterly wronged."

"Spare no pains to restore his reason, and I will cheerfully bear all expenses."

Then the landlord was called, and a room secured. Jubal Strong selected the guards, Trumps and Gold Dick, two miners out of employment, and Murat was carried away and locked up.

"Now, Mr. Goldspur, I'd like a word with you in private," the mayor declared, when quiet had been restored. "There are some features about this case which I do not understand and do not like. Will you oblige me?"

"With pleasure."

"Very good; we'll go to my office."

Turning, Jubal Strong passed out of the saloon and through the hotel office, closely followed by the sport. Just as they reached the outer door, a rifle cracked outside, and Gilbert Goldspur staggered and fell.

CHAPTER II.

THE SPORT AND THE MAYOR.

Although startled by that dastardly shot, Jubal Strong promptly drew his revolver and sent bullet after bullet in the direction of the lurking assassin, driving him from cover and forcing him into open flight.

"Never teched him!" the official growled, hastily recharging his smoking weapon.

"Call it an even deal then, pardner," Goldspur exclaimed, springing to his feet. "He's spoiled a mighty good hat, but there's never a break in my hide!"

A hurried explanation was then made to the excited throng, which had quickly gathered, and the mayor and the sport at once proceeded in the direction of the former's office.

Jubal Strong, it may be remarked, was the leading merchant of Red Gulch. His

store was centrally located, and occupied the lower floor of a roughly-built but substantial frame structure fronting on the main street of the camp.

The second floor was reached by a wooden stairway running up on the outside of the building, and it was here that the mayor had his office and sleeping apartment.

On gaining the top of this stairway, Strong promptly unlocked the door and ushered the sport into the office ere striking a light.

"We won't give 'em a second chance to practice sharpshooting this night," he remarked, as he closed and locked the door.

"Do you know, Goldspur, that I suspect the trick you've turned to-night is going to raise the very old deuce in Red Gulch?"

A peculiar expression crossed Gilbert Goldspur's face.

"To what trick do you refer, Mayor Strong?" he asked, as the rays of a lamp suddenly dispelled the darkness.

"Bringing Murat, the Mad Miner, into camp."

"Excuse me! I do not understand you."

Pushing his guest into a chair, Mayor Strong sat down, with hands on knees, facing him. His honest gray eyes gazed searchingly into the face of the sport.

Truly, it was not an ill-favored visage he looked upon. It was strong and clear cut—resolute rather than handsome, though by no means devoid of manly beauty.

The eyes were of deepest blue, bright and fearless, and a curling brown mustache shaded the firm upper lip. In height the sport was nearly or quite six feet. His form was erect and graceful, with broad, powerful shoulders, deep chest, and trim waist. An adept in athletics would have pronounced him at once supple and powerful.

As previously noted, he was stylishly dressed. From silk hat to patent-leather shoes, his garb was fully in keeping with fashion's latest decree.

A grim smile curled Jubal Strong's bearded lips, and after a moment's scrutiny he nodded shortly.

"You'll do, Gilbert Goldspur!" he abruptly exclaimed. "At first I feared—"

"Well?"

The mayor flushed.

"No matter what—just now!" he returned, a trace of that grim smile returning. "Let me ask you a question."

"Are you not called the Dandy Sport?"

"I have been so called—yes."

"Good! That simplifies matters, and I can forge ahead. Will you please go a trifle more into detail concerning your encounter with Murat?"

The sport inclined his head.

"If you really desire it, certainly," he replied. "There is but little to add to that which I have already told you, and that little I have reserved for your ears alone."

"If you have ever been over the trail to Paradise Bar, you will doubtless recall a point some miles out where the road runs through a narrow, rock-walled pass."

"Yes—Purgatory Pass, we call it."

"Well, just as I entered the pass, my horse caught a stone in his hoof, and I was compelled to dismount to remove it. At that very moment Murat made the attack upon me."

"He had evidently been lying in wait behind the rocks forming the upper portion of the wall, and as I stooped he shouted a name and leaped down to attack me."

"But the peculiar actions of my horses had put me on my guard, so that I easily eluded his rush, then grappled and overpowered him."

Jubal Strong smiled and nodded.

"You were alone?" he inquired.

"Oh, yes! Why ask?"

The mayor reflected a moment.

"Not to bring your truthfulness into question," he explained, at length; "but

this affair is a puzzle to me. Maniacs are reputed to possess superhuman strength. Yet, while virtually taken by surprise, you succeeded in overpowering the Mad Miner without serious injury to him or to yourself. Frankly, it is a strange case."

"Yes, it is," the sport admitted. "But I assure you I have narrated the circumstance just as it occurred. When I had bound the fellow, he set up such a clamor I was compelled to gag him. Then I cached my pack-saddle, bound him upon the horse, and came on to Red Gulch."

"You had concluded, then, that he was crazy?"

"Oh, yes! There could be no other explanation of his conduct. Then, too, his appearance was sufficient to betray 'the mind diseased.'"

"Yes, that cannot be denied," the mayor assented.

"What, may I ask, was the name he shouted when he attacked you?"

"Alexander Stamm."

"Alexander Stamm!"

"So I said, Mayor Strong."

"Man, do you know that Alex. Stamm is the richest man in Red Gulch?"

"I did not know it; no."

"Well, he is. He is the manager of the Rainbow mine. But, there is a cloud upon the mine. It involves Stamm. To my mind, it also involves Murat. If I am right, the attack upon you was inspired by a thirst for revenge."

Jubal Strong spoke in a low voice, but with intense earnestness.

"The Mad Miner, then, took me to be Stamm?"

"Exactly. Stamm rode out on that trail this morning, but came back by way of the road from the east, about dark. Murat had undoubtedly seen him going out, and was lying behind the rocks to ambush him on his return."

The sport listened patiently to the mayor's explanation, then shook his head in perplexity.

"I confess, mayor, that I am completely puzzled," he observed. "From all I can learn of the matter, this is the first time Murat has ever ventured near Red Gulch. I have often heard of him in the camps, but report always placed his stamping ground at least two hundred miles to the northward. It seems probable to me that he has simply wandered down this way—"

A quick uplifting of Jubal Strong's ponderous right hand checked that flow of words. Then his long forefinger tapped the breast of the sport, and his eyes flashed with resentment as he exclaimed:

"Enough of that story, Goldspur! Play honest and open if you'd have me for friend and ally."

"Meaning—"

"Just this: I know your game! Yes, even your enemies have read your hand aright, as that shot just now should have told you."

"You are a detective! You are here to clear up the Rainbow mine mystery, and I warn you here and now that you are fighting against desperate odds—literally bucking against a real tiger!"

CHAPTER III.

THE DEPUTY MARSHAL.

Routed from ambush by that storm of bullets from Jubal Strong's revolver, the thug lying in wait for Gilbert Goldspur had bounded nimbly down the shelving bank of Black Bear Creek, to run along the firm sands to the nearest ripple, where he crossed the stream and plunged into the shadows of a thicket.

"Struck a snag, dead shore!" he muttered, pausing to listen for sounds of pursuit. "I'm late, too, an' now thet I missed ther sharp I'd better report at once, or ther judge may perforate my kite."

Cautiously beating his way through the thicket, the would-be assassin gained the upper portion of the slope, and at once bent his steps toward a large cabin built against the face of a bluff.

On his near approach, a door was opened, and a voice exclaimed:

"Is it you, Weeping Mose?"

"You bet! An' clean fagged out at thet," was the sniveled response.

"Come inside. I've been waiting for you. We'll do business at once, and have done for the night, for I, too, am very tired."

"Thet suits me, Alex, man! An' I hopes it's true; but I've a big passel o' news."

"That may or may not be agreeable intelligence. But come; let us get into my private retreat, where we can determine these matters in greater safety."

Hastily fastening the door, Alexander Stamm crossed the cabin floor and led the way into a small, brilliantly lighted under-ground apartment, which contained a comfortable couch, a table, and three or four chairs.

"Be seated, Mose," he requested, indicating a seat at the table with a wave of his hand. "Just drop your repeater on the couch, there."

"I suppose you have dined and supped?"

"Nary a bite nor a drop in twelve hours, boss!" grimly declared the ruffian, discarding his rifle and helping himself to the chair. "But, hang the grub!"

"Did you know the old man had turned up in Red Gulch?"

At that abrupt query, a demijohn in the hands of Alexander Stamm fell crashing upon the floor, and his dark, sensuous face turned livid.

"The old man?" he repeated, his tones shaking with mingled consternation and incredulity.

"Yas, sir-ree!—ther old man hisself!"

"But, stiddy yerself, Alex! Don't lose yer grip now, man, when ye most need it!"

"But I am ruined!"

"Not yet! We still hold ther aidge! He is crazy es a loon!"

"Crazy?" With that ejaculation Stamm drew a long breath of relief. "That is well. It gives us a chance to play our hand."

"But tell me all, Mose, at once. We must lose no time."

Moses Lumper needed no urging. Briefly he told of the arrival of Gilbert Goldspur with Murat, the Mad Miner. He detailed each circumstance faithfully, and described the location of the room to which the unfortunate miner had been taken.

"I hates ter hev it ter say, boss, but thet Goldspur is a detective, an' bears a charmed life ter boot," he added, his watery eyes glowing wickedly. "Seein' thet he'd flushed our game an' war hyar ter make us trouble, I tried ter drop him, an' failed."

"A detective? You are sure, Mose?"

"Shore es fate, Alex!"

"But our—our work was covered deep! There can be no suspicion of—of—Pshaw! man, you make me nervous!"

"Can't help it! I told ye Agatha Grayson's lawyer hed written he war comin', an' thet he hed arranged ter meet a friend hyar who would undertake ter look inter sartin matters. This Goldspur is ther friend—ther detective."

Alexander Stamm seemed badly shaken. He strode moodily to and fro for several minutes ere speaking.

"We've got to fight," he declared at length, pausing directly in front of his ally. "Luckily, the cage is ready for the girl. You must lure her away tomorrow, and see that she doesn't come back."

"Thet part is all fixed, boss."

"But ther detective? What about him?"

"Leave him to me. I can arrange to dispose of him, and also of Murat," asserted Stamm, briefly. "I have a plan—the only one possible under the circumstances."

"Go, now, and hunt up Dick Dodds. Find him without fail, and tell him I want him to come here at once."

"Dick Dodds, ther United States deputy marshal?"

"Exactly."

"Lordy, boss! Et's risky—"

"Obey me, Lumper! No question—no comment, or your neck shall feel the halter!" cried Stamm, angrily.

"K'rect! I'm off!"

So saying, Weeping Mose sprang up, grasped his rifle and meekly followed Stamm to the cabin door.

Left alone, the Rainbow manager paced sulkily to and fro, communing with himself.

Ordinarily, he was a man of dignified presence, and bore an approach to corpulency with easy grace. He was well dressed, and not unhandsome, with short, black hair and beard and keen, slightly-protuberant black eyes. His face betrayed resolution, selfishness and cunning.

He had practiced law at one time, and had earned the title of judge.

Scarcely fifteen minutes had passed after the departure of Moses Lumper, when there came a sharp rap at the cabin entrance.

Stamm opened the door, and a short, stockily-built man entered the room.

"Good evening, judge!" he curtly greeted. "I believe you sent for me?"

"Yes, Dick Dodds, and I have work for you," Stamm responded, in firm tones.

"Come—don't look displeased, but nerve yourself for a task which will bring you gold and a new lease on life."

The deputy marshal changed color and nodded shortly, saying:

"Explain what is wanted, Alex. Stamm. If the task suits me, well and good; if not—"

"If not, you'll do it just the same, Dick Dodds, for I shall certainly cause you to be hanged if you refuse," interrupted Stamm, sternly.

The officer flinched.

"That is true," he admitted. "Name the deed."

"There are two men I want arrested and smuggled away from Red Gulch—perhaps three."

"You do not want them killed?"

"Oh, no! Dodds; I will not ask you to stain your hands with blood, but simply to arrest these men upon some trumped-up charge, to get them away from Red Gulch."

"One is the sport who has just arrived, Gilbert Goldspur, and the other is Murat, the Mad Miner."

"Can you arrange it?"

"I shall have to, judge, for you are a merciless scoundrel," was the bitter reply.

"I'll furnish whatever witnesses you may need," pursued Stamm, nodding complacently. "The only stipulations are that I am not to appear in the matter, and that you shall hold the men not less than thirty days—longer if possible."

"The third man I cannot speak of yet, but I shall notify you in due time if it becomes necessary to remove him."

"As pay for this service, I agree to keep quiet a while longer, and will give you \$100 for each man so arrested and held."

The deputy marshal flushed angrily.

"I do not want your money!" he protested, savagely.

"Oh, my dear fellow! You will be compelled to accept it," Stamm retorted. "You shall accept it in the presence of witnesses, too, for if trouble ev'r comes out of the deal it will help to show that you were an accessory."

"Now, Dick, do this at once, for time is pressing. Name the offenses you will charge, and I'll prepare the witnesses."

Scowling darkly, the entrapped officer pondered a moment, then said:

"Goldspur I shall charge with being a member of Cherokee Charlie's Hill Cruisers, while Murat can be taken in as a spy for the same outfit, feigning insanity."

"That will do," Stamm responded, approvingly.

"Go at once, Dodds, and perform the task, for there is not a moment to lose."

CHAPTER IV.

CHEROKEE CHARLIE APPEARS.

Despite Jubal Strong's intense earnestness, Goldspur laughed lightly, then nodded, saying:

"So there is a mystery connected with the Rainbow Mine, eh? I had heard as much, and am glad you confirm the report, for I delight in mysteries."

"There are ghosts, spooks, shades and what-nots, I reckon?"

Jubal Strong leaped to his feet and glared angrily at the coolly smiling sport.

"Confound you!" he gritted, his right hand moving unconsciously toward the pistol butt protruding from his belt. "If you're here to make war upon— Say it, pardner! Are you for or against the Graysons?"

"How can I say, hothead? Just set it down I'm for Murat, first, last and all the time—poor fellow!"

"Then you are a detective—"

"No; but I'm mighty apt to make work for a man in that line if you don't come to your senses and keep hands off that gun, Jubal Strong!"

"Now, I've said it, and I'm standing pat!"

The mayor recoiled sharply, and his brawny hand fell away from the weapon in his belt. Goldspur's blue eyes were gleaming darkly back of his leveled pistol, and his face showed that he was at last thoroughly aroused.

"Don't! I never—" Strong broke off in sheer shame and sank meekly into his chair.

"There! That is a great deal better," the Dandy Sport observed, putting up his weapon. "Let's both be amenable to reason. There's no excuse for quarreling just yet."

"Not even the shadow of one," the mayor confessed in a tone betraying both annoyance and contrition. "Goldspur, I reckon I am a hothead, and I want to apologize for my hasty words."

The sport nodded encouragingly.

"You see, I'm married—I'm in a peck of trouble," Strong continued. "As I see things, Red Gulch is on the brink of a big fight—a queer kind of a fight, too, and about the Rainbow Mine. It will be the Graysons against Alexander Stamm, the present manager of the mine—about as big a rascal as ever went unchanged."

"The Graysons own the Rainbow. There's two of them—a boy and a young woman—Con Grayson and his sister, Miss Agatha. The girl is one of the level-headed sort, but the boy's a soft mark for the Gulch sharps, and is rapidly running through his share of the property. He's in the clutches of Elephant Eph and John June, a brace of gamblers, who are secretly in cahoots with Stamm, who is Con's guardian. Among the three, the boy is faring badly. The sharps accept his notes for gambling debts, and Stamm discounts them at a heavy per cent."

"So-ho! That is their little game!" Goldspur exclaimed.

"Yes; and then, Stamm is an avowed suitor for the hand of Agatha Grayson. If he succeeds in marrying her, it will put him in virtual possession of the entire mine," and Jubal Strong's face again grew dark.

The Dandy Sport reflected a moment. There was a peculiar gleam in his eyes, and his right hand idly drummed the table.

"It certainly seems that this Stamm has a deep and skillful game afoot to secure the mine," he remarked, presently. "He is evidently a first-class scoundrel."

"But you have failed, Mr. Mayor, to throw light upon the point which interests me most—the mystery you alluded to."

"That story is a long one. Briefly put, the mystery concerns the fate of Gabriel Grayson, discoverer of the mine and father of the present owners. Stamm declares that he was killed by Indians, a few years ago; but I have it from reputable witnesses that Grayson has been seen, alive, within the past two years,

wandering through the mountains," declared the mayor.

"But if alive, he would certainly return and claim his property, would he not?"

"It puzzles me that he has not done so. My idea is that he is demented. In a word, Goldspur, I have reached the conclusion that Murat, the Mad Miner, is none other than Gabriel Grayson!"

The sport nodded and smiled.

"It may be that your conclusion is correct," he admitted. "At any rate, it will do no harm to hope that you have hit upon the truth."

"You do not know, then?"

"How could I know? Am I not a stranger here? Let it answer that I was on my way here to try my luck when assailed by Murat; that, when I had overpowered him, something in his face appealed to me so strongly that I determined to see what could be done for him."

Jubal Strong's hopeful expression changed, and he shifted uneasily on his chair.

"Of course, this is all in confidence, Goldspur," he blurted at length.

"Oh, yes; I understand that."

"You see, when I saw the drift of Stamm's game, I determined to thwart him if possible, and persuaded Miss Grayson to write to her lawyer, explaining matters so far as she knew them, and requesting him to come here. He agreed, not only to come, but to send a competent man in advance to investigate Stamm's conduct of the Rainbow. At first, Goldspur, I believed you to be that man."

The sport laughed.

"You acknowledge you were mistaken?" he asked.

"Yes. However, if you are foot-loose and free—simply a sport seeking fortune—I am in a position to make you an offer worth consideration."

Hiding a yawn behind his hand, Goldspur rose to his feet and stretched himself lazily.

"I'd like to oblige you, mayor; but I shall have to decline in advance," he returned, calmly. "However, you may rely upon me as being friendly to the cause of the Graysons."

"Now, if you will excuse me, I will return to the hotel and see if fortune is in a smiling mood."

"Certainly," the official responded, a trifle stiffly, and rising, he opened the door and saw the sport out with a curt "Good-night."

On gaining the street, Goldspur paused and glanced back at Jubal Strong's windows.

"Ah! if he only knew," he muttered, smiling grimly.

The gambling-hall at the Gold-Bar Palace presented an animated appearance. The hour was long past midnight, but many of the tables were surrounded by players, and in some cases the stakes were unusually large.

In a corner of the room, seated around a poker table, were three men in whom we have an interest. They were Conrad Grayson, Elephant Eph, and Johnny June.

Behind Grayson's chair, leaning against the wall and watching the game in a listless manner, stood Gilbert Goldspur. His brows wore a slight frown, and his thoughts seemed far away.

Suddenly the sport started, and an angry gleam shot from his blue eyes. Stepping forward, he tapped Grayson upon the shoulder.

"Young man, that scoundrel is robbing you!" he curtly exclaimed, pointing to the gambler, Elephant Eph. "He has just stolen an ace from the discard, and now holds six cards."

Quickly tossing his hand into the discard, Elephant Eph, livid with rage, leaped to his feet.

"I brand that statement as false!" he gritted, his black eyes gleaming wickedly as he glanced from the startled youth to the accusing sport, his hand closing upon a weapon.

"I take it, sir, that you are a meddling scoundrel looking for trouble!"

"Hardly that, Elephant Eph, though a bit of gun-play with you as a target would suit me first-rate!" was the cool retort. "A fine specimen of sport you are, stealing cards to rob a mere boy! Draw—"

"Peace, gentlemen!" sternly interposed Johnny June, over leveled weapons. "There shall be no trouble in my house!"

"Stranger, you have my thanks for exposing the crookedness of Elephant Eph—a thing I have long suspected, but never detected."

"And you, Elephant Eph!—you infernal scoundrel!—get you hence! Never enter these doors again unless you court death!"

That the little gambler was in deadly earnest no man could doubt. Utterly cowed by his determined stand, Elephant Eph, with a muttered oath and a single threatening glance at Goldspur, turned and walked slowly out of the house.

"Come," exclaimed the Dandy Sport, again touching Conrad Grayson upon the shoulder. "Don't you think it about time to quit for the night?"

Like one electrified, the youth sprang to his feet and confronted Goldspur—only to shrink back in shame and confusion.

Then a spasm of rage shook his slender form, and he stamped the floor angrily.

"You here!" he snarled. "You, too, playing the spy upon me!"

"Curse you! Take that!"

His open hand fell savagely upon Goldspur's face, leaving a dull, red mark. The sport recoiled; a tigerish glow leaped into his blue eyes, and his face grew ghastly white.

In alarm, Johnny June sprang between the man and the stripling. The action was needless, however. Goldspur, by a powerful effort, repressed that threatened outburst of just but deadly anger.

"You shall yet have cause to repent that blow, Conrad Grayson!" he coldly declared, turning toward the door.

But, at that juncture, Dick Dodds, the deputy marshal, deftly pushed his way through the crowd to the side of the sport, and seized him by the arm.

"You are under arrest, Gilbert Goldspur!" he exclaimed.

"On what charge, sir?"

"Outlawry—with being a member of Cherokee Charlie's band!"

A thunderbolt from a cloudless sky could scarcely have been more startling than that arrest. The crowd stood motionless, and for fully a minute not so much as a whisper was heard.

Then, a wild, derisive laugh echoed through the room, and a muscular-looking man near the door leaped upon a chair, with a cocked revolver in each hand.

"That tenderfoot a member of my outfit!" he cried, in grim sarcasm. "My word for it, he never saw an outlaw camp!"

"And I, gentlemen, have the honor to be Cherokee Charlie!"

"If you want a real, live outlaw, Mr. Dodds, come take me!"

That reckless challenge stung the deputy to madness. Releasing Goldspur's arm, he leaped forward and fairly beat his way through the crowd, until tripped up by an outstretched foot.

Intense confusion followed. Then came a wild yell from the street, and a noisy clatter of hoofs announced the escape of the bold outlaw.

When order was at last restored, Gilbert Goldspur was missing.

CHAPTER V.

THE JUDGE'S ERRAND.

The Graysons lived in a neat cottage on a small terrace overlooking the southern extremity of Red Gulch.

Agatha was the elder of the heirs—a splendid-looking young woman of perhaps five-and-twenty years. Her form was a trifle above the height common to her sex, exquisitely developed and of lis-

some grace. She was a brunette, with black hair and large, lustrous black eyes, and a face of almost faultless mold. Her complexion was extremely fair; her lips, full, yet delicately curved, were red as the ripened cherry, and, parted slightly, disclosed small, even teeth of milky whiteness.

Then, too, she was a girl of more than average intelligence, accomplished, and possessed of a really good business education.

Judge Alexander Stamm, as manager of the Rainbow Mine and guardian of Conrad Grayson, had certainly learned to respect this latter qualification, for the girl not only looked closely after her own interest in the mine, but also managed to keep fairly well informed as to her brother's affairs.

Conrad Grayson was very unlike his sister. He was a tall, handsome, well-built youth, fair-haired and blue-eyed, but weak, irresolute and easily influenced. He was in his nineteenth year, and for several months had been a resident of Red Gulch, under orders from his guardian.

"The boy is a trifle too wild," the judge had explained to Agatha, in his specious way. "He has been twice expelled from college, and there is little likelihood that he can be induced to complete his education. As he will be of age in a couple of years, and come into his share of the Rainbow, I have thought it better to have him come here, where he will be under your influence and mine, while gaining practical knowledge of mining affairs."

Unfortunately, this view of the case had met with the approval of Agatha, and shortly thereafter Conrad arrived, and assumed a position in the Rainbow office.

The position was a sinecure, the salary most liberal, and the youth went rapidly from bad to worse, despite the protests of his guardian and the entreaties of his sister.

"He is wild and headstrong, and cannot be controlled," Judge Stamm frequently declared.

"No, only weak and irresolute," Agatha would insist. "He is being led astray, Judge Stamm!"

And Agatha Grayson was right. Unknown to her, Alexander Stamm was playing a desperate, a merciless, game. In collusion with Elephant Eph, he was deliberately luring Conrad Grayson to ruin.

On the morning following the appearance of Gilbert Goldspur in Red Gulch, Agatha, in her kindly but incisive way, took her brother to task. They had finished breakfast, but were lingering at the table, when the girl abruptly exclaimed:

"Con, I want you to make me a promise!"

The youth looked furtively at his sister. His eyes were bloodshot, his face was flushed, and his hands shook nervously.

"A promise, sis?" he returned, in some surprise.

"So I said, Con."

"I want you to break with your evil associates. They are wrecking you, soul and body!"

"You drink and you gamble, and so unfit yourself for business that you neglect your duties at the mine."

Con laughed uneasily.

"Well, hang it all, sis! What else is a fellow to do in this dry old camp?" he retorted.

"Do? Employ your time usefully. Apply yourself to your business. The management of the Rainbow will soon devolve upon you, and you should fit yourself for the position."

"And Judge Stamm, sis?"

"He does not enter into the question."

"Why, sis! I have understood otherwise!"

Agatha Grayson's face flushed, then turned very pale. But her black eyes flashed angrily.

"Brother!" she exclaimed. "Never repeat such an insinuation, within my hearing or elsewhere."

Con Grayson frowned.

"Well, the judge is all right," he protested, sullenly. "He's a good fellow—my best friend, and I'd like to see him your husband."

"He is your worst enemy!" flashed Agatha. "I firmly believe, Con, that man is secretly urging you on in your dissipation."

Again the youth started and laughed uneasily.

"Oh, no; that is nonsense!" he returned, impatiently. "Alex. Stamm is the soul of honor—that I know! And you must remember, sis, that he was our father's friend, and stood by him through thick and thin in the development of the Rainbow."

"It was father's wish, too, that you might—"

A warning gesture from the girl caused Con Grayson to break off in confusion, and his bloodshot eyes turned to the floor.

Silence came between the two. But it was of only a moment's duration, for Agatha quickly renewed the attack.

"How about the promise, Con? Am I to have it?" she asked.

The youth's downcast face betrayed a sharp mental struggle. He seemed to waver, to hesitate. Then his expression changed, and he looked up with an air at once pleading and defiant.

"Don't mention this matter to Aunt Parker, Agatha," he returned, curtly, as he rose from the table. "Give me till this time to-morrow, and I'll tell you."

With a sadly troubled face, Agatha also rose.

"Think well, Con," she requested, in a voice of quiet earnestness. "Something tells me you are upon the brink of ruin."

"Oh, nonsense!"

"No, not nonsense, Con, but bitter, black truth, I fear!" was the sad rejoinder.

"And, now, brother, I want to tell you a bit of news. Orrville Dubois will be here to-morrow. He comes on the Top-Notch stage, and I wish you to meet him and bring him here."

Con Grayson shrank back. Disgust and alarm flashed over his face.

"Not that—"

A swift look of warning from Agatha checked the words upon his fevered lips. The door had been opened silently, and Moses Lumper stood within the room.

"Mornin', Miss Agatha an' Master Con!" the fellow sniveled, with a nod to each, while briskly rubbing his strangely-knotted hands. "Am I airly, or be I late?"

"Just on time, Mr. Lumper," Agatha returned, with a glance at the clock, while Con strode out of the room. "Sit down; it will require but a few minutes for us to come to an understanding."

"'Twill take mighty leetle time, I reckon," responded Weeping Mose, seating himself and leaning toward the girl in a confidential manner. "Pervided I've understood ye right."

Agatha smiled.

"The errand is a very simple one," she explained, pleasantly. "It is really easier than the one of yesterday."

"I want you to come here, mounted and armed, at ten o'clock this morning, to guide me to the claim of the Hermit-Miners. Is that quite plain?"

"Yas; I onderstand," Mose replied, with a nod. "Et's jest what ye said before."

"But I allers likes ter be sure, fer ever since ther day Gabe Grayson, yer daddy, war killed, when I got so bad hurted, I finds I cain't be too keerful, fer my head gits weak sometimes, an' I fer-gits a part."

"Lor! Miss Agatha, that war a wild day—a red day! Jes' think; of ther hull twelve of us, on'y me an' the jedge escaped, an' we so bad hurted 'twar weeks afore we c'u'd travel!"

"But my old head must be wrong fer shore, fer I'm gittin' clean off ther trail an' over in the valley o' ther past!"

"I'll go now an' git ready, an' you fix ter start at ten sharp, fer ther ride is long an' ther trail rough, an' we must start airly ter dodge night comin' back."

Then the cunning scoundrel, feeling that he had played his part most skillfully, carefully wiped his chronically red and dripping eyes, rose and departed.

Scarcely had he disappeared, when a sharp knocking resounded through the house, and a moment later Margaret, the colored maid-of-all-work, announced a caller.

And this early-morning visitor was none other than Judge Alexander Stamm!

CHAPTER VI.

THE JUDGE REBUFFED.

"Good-morning, Miss Grayson," the Rainbow manager exclaimed, rising and inclining himself profoundly, when his beautiful hostess appeared.

"Good-morning, Judge Stamm," Agatha responded, courteously, but in a cold and formal tone.

"May I ask, sir, the occasion for this early call?"

"Certainly, Miss Grayson—certainly," the judge replied, his easy assurance unshaken by that abrupt question. "I came upon a matter of great importance."

"As you are aware, I am making preparations to be absent from Red Gulch for several weeks, and will leave sometime to-morrow."

"Before starting, however, there is a matter—a matter, I may say, that lies very near to my heart—which I wish to discuss with you."

Agatha nodded crisply.

"Spare yourself further words, Judge Stamm," she requested, kindly, yet firmly. "You may consider my former answer as final."

"Moreover, I must request you never to reopen this subject, for it is extremely distasteful to me."

A dark look came upon Alexander Stamm's handsome visage, and his hands clenched involuntarily.

"Are you quite sure, Miss Grayson, that you fully understand this case?" he asked, in suppressed tones, his black eyes fixed keenly upon her face. "Do you know all that is involved in your decision?"

"Oh, yes; I believe so, Judge Stamm."

"You are fully determined, then, to disregard the last-expressed desire of your dead father?"

"If such was his wish or desire, I decline to be bound by it. But I very much doubt if any such idea ever occurred to my father!"

"In fact, I sometimes feel that my father yet lives!"

Judge Stamm started, and the color left his face.

"Meaning—"

"Just this, Alexander Stamm: That to further your personal ends, I believe you have brought your imagination into play!" cut in Agatha, coldly.

The judge leaped to his feet.

"Great heavens! Girl, are you charging me with deliberate falsehood?" he demanded, hoarsely.

"Not in so many words; no! But, candidly, I have learned to regard you and your statements with a great deal of suspicion, to say the least, Judge Stamm!"

"There was a witness to every word your father uttered, Agatha Grayson!"

"Moses Lumper?"

"Yes, Moses Lumper! I am sure that I have adhered so closely to the exact truth that he will bear me out in every statement I have made as coming from Gabriel Grayson."

Agatha smiled coldly.

"You must remember that Moses Lumper is not a competent witness, Judge Stamm," she returned, quietly. "His brain has gone wrong. Indeed, it is not half an hour since I was compelled to repeat to him instructions for a simple errand!"

"But it is only of late that he has become mentally unbalanced, and this case was passed upon long before any disorder of the brain was apparent, or even suspected."

"Indeed!"

"Oh, yes!" the judge assured, with triumphant mien. "And I may say, too, Agatha Grayson, that I hold, as executor of the estate and guardian of Conrad, a copy of your father's last will and testament—written by myself, it is true, but at his dictation and bearing his signature, which is witnessed by myself and Moses Lumper!"

"This request—nay, command—concerning yourself was added as a codicil, over my protest, and the will entire has been accepted by the courts as valid."

"I am explaining fully, for I want you to understand this matter before rashly committing yourself."

"Spare us both the infliction, Judge Stamm," Agatha retorted, with just a tinge of sarcasm in her tones. "It is only a useless waste of time."

"Perhaps!" grimly. "And yet, Agatha Grayson, I am duty-bound to speak fully and freely!"

"This codicil which I have mentioned expressly provides that in the event of your refusing to become my wife, your one-half interest in the Rainbow Mine shall revert to me!"

"Understand, I do not covet the property, for I am pretty well fixed so far as this world's goods are concerned; but your father's last wishes should—"

"Stop!"

With that sternly enunciated command Agatha Grayson rose to her feet. On each fair cheek was an indignant flush, and her big black eyes blazed with anger. Almost savagely, her slender hand struck a bell upon the table.

In a moment the old negress appeared. "Margaret, you will show Judge Stamm to the door!"

"If he calls again, he is not to be admitted."

"Yas, missy," the servant responded, and Agatha turned and swept out of the room.

Taking up his hat, Judge Stamm strode out into the hail, and departed, half-crazed with rage and chagrin.

"Curse the girl's obstinacy!" he muttered, as he strode down the broad driveway leading from the terrace to Red Gulch's winding street. "But I'll break her spirit yet—and win the mine!"

Meanwhile, Agatha Grayson had returned to the dining-room. Her face was yet pale, and her eyes sparkled with excitement and indignation; but she was otherwise composed, and at once lost sight of her cares amid her household duties.

Little more than an hour had elapsed when there was another vigorous knocking at the door, and a moment later Margaret appeared, bearing a bit of white bristol board.

Agatha Grayson's face underwent a peculiar change as she read from this card the inscription:

"Mr. John June,
"Cosmopolitan."

"My goodness! It is the Gold-Bar Sport!" the girl ejaculated, turning the dainty bit of scented board over and over. "Now, what can he want? Is it another of Con's scrapes?"

"Well, I must see!"

With Agatha Grayson, to think was to act. In another minute she was on her way to meet her visitor.

CHAPTER VII.

THE GOLD-BAR SPORT EXPLAINS.

John June, the Gold-Bar Sport, was a very small, slender man, and in height exceeded five feet but an inch or two. His eyes, bright and steely blue, sat well back under shaggy, overhanging brows; his head was large, and the smoothly-shaven face strong, resolute and determined—one expressive of courage, shrewdness and keen, accurate judgment. From patent-leather shoes to glossy

silk hat, his attire was faultless, and his age might easily have been any year between thirty and fifty, so far as appearances went.

He rose gracefully as the girl entered the room, and bowed, gravely saying:

"This is Miss Grayson, sister of Conrad Grayson, I believe?"

"Yes, Mr. June; I am Conrad Grayson's sister," Agatha replied.

"Will you be seated?"

"Thank you, no, Miss Grayson," was the reply with that same gravity of face and voice which had characterized his initial utterance. "And I trust that you will accept as a poor apology for this intrusion the excuse that I came seeking to serve the interests of your brother."

The girl bowed and smiled.

"The apology is certainly ample, Mr. June," she averred, simply.

"You came to tell me, I suppose, that Conrad has been gambling again?"

"Plainly, Miss Grayson, yes! He has been not only gambling, but losing heavily. He is in the clutches of an organized cohort, headed by no less a personage than Judge Alexander Stamm, and I state only the truth when I say his present plight is most desperate."

"I had feared as much—nay, have almost known it to be true!"

"And my informant, Mr. June, emphatically asserted that you were one of that same cohort!"

The gambler's steely blue eyes emitted a peculiar glint.

"Yes? It was a natural conclusion, I suppose," he returned, calmly. "Nevertheless, Miss Grayson, your informant was mistaken. A black sheep I may be, but it has never been my purpose to rob either woman or child."

"But that is Stamm's game. He is after the Rainbow Mine. He has Con's share fairly within his grasp, and his next move will be to oust you."

"It was to warn you of these facts that I called this morning. I have brought with me notes representing a considerable amount, which Conrad owes to me. These notes I now transfer to you, without consideration. You may notify Stamm that you have bought them in. It will block his game, I believe."

As the gambler finished, he handed over a thin packet of papers.

Agatha turned pale, and shrank back.

"Mr. June, I cannot accept the notes," she protested, firmly.

"Miss Grayson, you must take them, and you must notify Stamm that you hold them."

"I cannot."

"Very well; there is one other to whom I can convey these notes, although I am disappointed, for I felt assured that under the circumstances you would receive them."

"You refer to Conrad?"

"No; to Orrville Dubois."

"Impossible!"

A faint smile curled the gambler's lips. "No, not impossible," he returned, gravely. "Dubois and myself have been friends these many years."

"In fact, I am simply acting as his agent in this matter, as a glance at this letter will prove," and he handed the girl a closely-written letter.

"It is indeed from Dubois," Agatha admitted, after a moment, and the look of incredulity faded from her face. "I ask your pardon, Mr. June, and will accept the notes pending the arrival of Mr. Dubois."

The gambler bowed.

"It gives me pleasure to yield them," he returned.

"And now, Miss Grayson, let me ask you to be extremely careful during the next few days. Stamm is being slowly pushed into a corner, and will hesitate at no act, however bold and desperate, to save himself."

Then the voice of the Gold-Bar Sport sank to a lower key. For several minutes he spoke rapidly, in explanation. Agatha's mobile face betrayed a variety of emotions—first incredulity, then sur-

prise and sorrow, and, finally, joyous relief.

"I believe I understand it all, now, Mr. June," she asserted, with a slight nod, when the gambler had ended. "You may say that I shall comply with the instructions as nearly as possible."

The Gold-Bar Sport bowed ceremoniously, and at once departed.

Scarcely a half-hour later, Moses Lumper appeared, splendidly mounted and thoroughly armed, and Agatha at once prepared to accompany him.

As a precaution, the girl slipped a brace of freshly-charged revolvers into the holsters attached to her saddle, and as she sent her spirited Indian pony clattering swiftly out of Red Gulch she had no dread of danger.

Lumper, astride of a clean-limbed clay-back, set the pace. The artful scoundrel was confident of success, and his face was wreathed in smiles.

Hardly more than a passing word was spoken during the first five miles of the trip. Agatha was busy reviewing the events of the morning, while the guide was fully preoccupied with his plot to capture the girl.

"How long have the Hermit Miners been working their claim?" Agatha suddenly asked, as they slackened speed on a steep ascent.

Lumper started guiltily and changed color, then stammered:

"Eh? Oh! 'Bout a year, I sh'u'd say."

"Leastways, I've heer'd o' them thet long, an' they do say thar hes bin a powerful lot o' rich quartz sacked out o' nights durin' thet time."

"You have never seen the vein, Mr. Lumper?"

"On'y jest ther weenty-peep I've done told ye 'bout, mom! No man darst venture onto their claim 'thout a special invite, for bein' dead shots both is rank p'ison ter meddlers."

"And you, Lumper?"

"Jest es I told ye, mom. They halled me, an' dickered 'ith me ter go quiet an' find 'em a boyer, seein' es they'd cleaned up a good speck an' was wantin' ter move on."

"But if the vein is not exhausted and is so rich, why should they want to sell?" pursued Agatha, her dark eyes keenly noting each change in her guide's expression.

"Hain't I never hinted ther why an' ther wharfore?" Lumper retorted, testily. "Didn't I 'sinewate they was fugitives f'm jestice, an' that they felt et war time ter move on?"

Agatha nodded.

"The vein is all right—'pend on thet," Lumper continued. "Ef ye hedn't 'a' bin my ole pard's darter, or even ef I'd on'y 'a' hed the price—"

That cunning fabrication remained unfinished. A snarling cry, betraying both fear and anger, burst from the guide's grimly compressed lips, and he pulled his horse squarely around.

At that point the trail was heavily bordered with masses of broken rock and dwarfed timber, forming a chain of natural coverts for man or beast, while ahead the narrow roadway was barricaded!

"Back, gal! Cut loose whip an' spur fer Red Gulch!" gritted Lumper, savagely grasping Agatha's rein. "Et's road-agents—no less!"

True enough! But that warning cry came too late, for a half-dozen men, armed and masked, quickly leaped from cover, and in another minute the treacherous guide and his fair convoy were fairly within the toils.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE FACE IN THE CAVERN.

"Steady, there, all two of you!" ordered the leader of the masked men, rapidly advancing. "Just rest easy, and don't fret. You cannot escape!"

No idle boast was that, as Agatha saw at a glance, and she drew rein sharply. Her face was pale, but she sat her saddle firmly and betrayed no sign of fear.

Weeping Mose was greatly perturbed. He changed color, and muttered an oath. His yellow teeth gritted in silent rage, but he wisely refrained from drawing a weapon, and held up his hands in token of meek submission.

"That is sensible!" the outlaw declared. "You are gaining in wisdom as well as in years, Moses Lumper!"

"Yas, I reckon. But ef 'twa'n't fer ther gal—"

"You'd show fight? Nonsense! My word for it, we'd see only a swift pair of heels!"

"But, come, Moses, old boy! Light out of your saddle until one of my lads can pay his respects to your pockets, for I'm thinking you carry a fat purse this mornin'."

Inwardly cursing and fuming, the entrapped rascal swung his feet clear of the stirrups and dropped to the ground, where he was quickly searched by two of the bandits.

Curiously, the outlaw chief watched that lawless process, his eyes gleaming darkly through the holes in his mask. No pocket was overlooked, no bit of paper allowed to escape!

"Make a note of the exact amount of money, Red Buck," he ordered, in metallic tones. "And the papers—you know your business, man?"

A curt nod was the answer, and then the chief turned to Agatha.

"I am sorry, Miss Grayson, that circumstances compelled this step," he assured, with a bow. "And it is with yet deeper regret I now announce that you are to accompany us."

Agatha's eyes flashed angrily.

"You mean that I am a captive?" she interrogated.

"Precisely, Miss Grayson!"

"Then, sir—"

"Do not let indignation get the better of judgment!" interrupted the outlaw, coldly. "Your captivity will be brief, and we intend you no harm. Just permit me to explain:

"I am Cherokee Charlie. These gallant gentlemen are members of my band. The trick we are turning, right now, is our every-day business.

"Last night, we had the good fortune to capture a wealthy pilgrim from the East, one Orrville Dubois—"

"Orrville Dubois?"

"Exactly! He is a lawyer, and we are holding him for ransom.

"But I am pleased, Miss Grayson, to note that your interest is awakened, and venture the prediction that you will gladly agree to pay us a handsome bonus before the adventure ends!"

Agatha shook her head in a decided negative.

"I do not agree with you on that point, Cherokee Charlie," she declared. "Say, rather, that I shall add my mite to the rewards offered for you, dead or alive, for you certainly deserve to hang."

The outlaw chuckled; then, ignoring that pointed quip, continued:

"From Dubois's papers and letters, we discovered that he had been on his way to Red Gulch to consult you on business matters of great importance, and we at once decided to bring about a meeting between you, as we had no desire to see your interests suffer.

"Accordingly, I went down to Red Gulch later in the evening to arrange the matter, but learned that you were to visit the Hermit Miner's to-day, under escort of the valiant Mr. Lumper, and so changed my plans.

"Now, Miss Grayson, we feel in duty bound to escort you direct to Mr. Dubois. You may be assured that no harm shall come to you while in our hands, and if you will pledge us your word not to attempt to escape you may ride just as you are, free, and fully armed."

Thinly veiled as was Cherokee Charlie's real purpose, Agatha Grayson believed it better, just then, to feign ignorance, so smiled and said:

"Certainly, I will promise, for it is indeed important that I see Orrville Dubois at the earliest moment possible.

"Pray do not delay, but lead on at once, so that I may return to Red Gulch before night."

Smiling grimly, the outlaw chief turned aside, and in low but hurried tones issued orders to his men.

Weeping Mose, despite his protests, was quickly bound upon his horse. Then a gag was forced between his jaws and a bandage tied tightly over his eyes.

That done, the barricade across the trail was hastily removed, and Cherokee Charlie led the way back into the scrubby timber, where the horses, in charge of an outlaw, were in waiting.

Then came the order to mount, and in another minute the band was moving slowly through the timber, in single file, a veteran grown gray in outlawry in the lead, while Cherokee Charlie brought up the rear.

Straight into the mountains ran the course, and for upward of two hours the cavalcade moved onward at varying pace. Then the sound of a rushing torrent came faintly to the ears of all, and Cherokee Charlie ordered a halt.

"I shall have to bandage your eyes for the remainder of the trip, Miss Grayson," he announced, spurring forward and drawing rein beside the captive.

Agatha's face flushed, and her heart rose in hot rebellion. But she knew the utter futility of resistance, and quietly yielded.

"Very well," she returned, coldly.

Then the bandage was applied, the line formed anew with two abreast, and the outlaws again moved forward at a slow trot.

The cavalcade entered a shallow stream, but whether the course was with or against the current neither captive could tell. For nearly an hour a monotonous plashing of the water continued, to change suddenly into the dull clangor of iron-shod hoofs beating steadily upon solid rock.

That there had been an abrupt transition from the heat and the glare of the sun to deep and sombre shade, both captives knew, and each hailed the change with a breath of relief.

"The course has changed again," Agatha thought. "We are certainly in a dry canyon, and probably not far from the den."

The girl's surmise was correct.

A few minutes later the order to halt was given, and then Agatha was lifted from the saddle, placed upon her feet and led into an adjoining cavern, where the bandage was stripped from her eyes.

"You will remain here for the present," Cherokee Charlie ordered. "My wife will join you in a moment, to attend to your wants."

The outlaw's tones were not unkindly. Nodding acquiescence, Agatha sank into a rustic chair and calmly waited.

Meanwhile, Moses Lumper had been roughly pulled from his horse and half-carried, half-dragged into another branch of the cavern, where he was secured to the wall with a stout chain and padlock.

Then the gag was taken from his mouth and the bandage from his eyes, and he was left in solitude to accustom himself to his unpleasant surroundings.

"Ef I hain't gone an' got myself in a nice pickle, a-bendin' ther knee ter Alex. Stamm!" he snarled, licking his cracked lips wolfishly, while peering furtively through the gloom at his surroundings. "I on'y hopes he's next on ther list!"

"An' I reckon this hyar is all a job putt up by ther Dandy Sport! Cuss him! Ef I ever—"

That splenetic threat, whatever it may have been, was never finished. A slight sound attracted the attention of the groveling wretch, and he turned his head to peer over his shoulder.

A yell of terror burst from his craven lips.

A face had met his gaze—a face wild and haggard, but instantly recognizable as that of Murat, the Mad Miner!

CHAPTER IX.

DICK DODDS IN TROUBLE.

Scarcely had the excitement following the escape of the bold outlaw, Cherokee Charlie, from the Gold-Bar Palace, begun to abate, when Dick Dodds, the deputy marshal, retraced his steps to secure his prisoner.

But Gilbert Goldspur was missing. Evidently, he had taken advantage of the existing confusion to steal quietly away and escape from camp.

Such, at least, was the freely-voiced opinion of many of the miners and sports; but Dick Dodds felt that they were mistaken.

Intuition told him that the Dandy Sport was near, and he resolved to make a thorough search, first of the hotel, then of the entire camp, if it became necessary.

Calling a number of men to his assistance, the deputy placed one at each entrance, then accompanied by the landlord started to ferret out his man.

"It's ten to one you're making a big mistake, Dick Dodds," the landlord declared. "To begin with, the charge you make against this Goldspur is simply preposterous, for I've an idea the man is not only honest, but a thorough gentleman."

"In fact, I fully expect to see him come back and compel you to eat your words!"

A sinister look crossed the officer's face. He made no audible response, but silently started up the narrow stairway, revolver in hand.

Not three steps had he climbed when there was a sound of hasty walking above, and Gold Dick, closely followed by Trumps, appeared at the head of the stairs.

"Ho, landlord! Our man is gone!" called the foremost miner, excitedly, as he beheld the boniface and the officer below.

"Yes, he's clean skipped, we'pons an' all," added Trumps, over his comrade's shoulder.

"Not Murat, boys?"

"Yas, Murat, pard landlord."

To Dick Dodds this news was most unpleasant, and he bounded quickly up the stairway.

"Lead me to the room," he commanded, sternly. "There has been neglect of duty here—neglect most serious in its consequences, I fear!"

The deputy was not popular with the camp's denizens, but was feared, and Gold Dick and Trumps at once exerted themselves to clear their skirts of suspicion or blame.

"Murat was in this room, right hyar, Pard Dick," Trumps hastily volunteered, and he pointed to a door opening into the hall.

"Yas, an' his belt an' we'pons hung on this hyar rack," Gold Dick explained. "Trumps an' me hed these two chairs, an' sat right by ther door."

"But you left the door?"

"On'y fer a minute, Pard Dick."

"We heer'd ther racket raised by Cherokee Charlie, an' ran ter ther stairs, hopin' ter get a wing shot at him. Then we pranced right back."

"An' we kept an eye this way a-goin' an' a-comin', too, Gold Dick assured.

The deputy frowned.

"But you were careless enough to let him escape," he growled.

"We'll strike ther critter's trail an' run him down ag'in," Trumps suggested. "Ef we'd on'y knowed Murat war wan-ed—"

"The real Murat is not wanted," Dick Dodds explained, in a more pacific tone. "This fellow is a member of Cherokee Charlie's layout, I am told, and is here as a spy."

"Go, Gold Dick, and you, Trumps, and quietly look around the camp for him. Tell no one your business, but bring him in if you can, and unharmed."

"If you fail to find him, see if you can strike his trail, at daybreak, and hang to it till you run him to his hole."

"It is important that I find him and

learn the truth, so I will pay each of you fifty dollars if you succeed in bringing him in."

"Hooray! Pard Dick, thet's ther talk!" cried Trumps, tossing up his battered hat. "Fifty dollars! Heigho! I'd eat my 'ole boots, hob-nails an' all, jest now, fer ther hafe o' thet!"

Then the two miners hurried away, while the deputy and the landlord made a hasty examination of the room occupied by the Mad Miner.

The search was fruitless, however, for Murat had left nothing to indicate the manner of his escape. The window was down and fastened on the inside, while the bed had not been occupied.

"He was on the alert, waiting just such a chance as that offered by the momentary absence of Trumps and Gold Dick," the deputy observed.

"Indeed, it is more than probable that Cherokee Charlie's demonstration down stairs was intended to draw away the guards and give the spy a chance to escape."

The landlord shook his head.

"Somehow, I don't see the thing as you do, Dick," he returned, coolly. "To my mind, it was the genuine Murat who occupied the room, and you are on the wrong trail so far as both he and the sport are concerned."

Dick Dodds glanced at the landlord in a peculiar way, but uttered no response, and the search for Gilbert Goldspur was begun anew.

Every nook and corner of the hotel was thoroughly examined, but no trace of the Dandy Sport was to be found.

"He, too, made his escape during the confusion," averred the deputy, in disgust. "A bit of pretty plain evidence of guilt, I should say!"

Then both men returned to the gambling hall, the sentries at the doors were relieved, and quiet again came over the place.

A number of the players had taken their departure, and Con Grayson was among them. The youth had lost heavily, and report said that he had departed in an ugly mood, breathing vengeance against Elephant Eph.

Worried at his ill-success, the deputy sat down and lighted a cigar. He felt that he was upon dangerous ground, for Alexander Stamm would be in a rage when he heard of the escape of the sport and the Mad Miner.

There seemed to be no way to mend the situation, however, and for some minutes Dick Dodds contemplated flight. A darker project finally crept into his brain, and he sat with knitted brow, idly drumming the table.

Then a sudden commotion near the door attracted his attention. A single glance in that direction, and he leaped to his feet, revolver in hand.

Gilbert Goldspur had reappeared!

The Dandy Sport moved forward with smiling assurance. There was absolutely nothing in his appearance indicative of uneasiness or fear.

"It is really kind in you to come back, Mr. Goldspur!" the deputy exclaimed, sarcastically, as he suddenly stepped in front of the sport, revolver in hand. "I had given you up as missing!"

"Now, you will oblige me by quietly yielding!"

"You have a warrant, Mr. Dodds?"

"No; I have no warrant."

"You must get one."

"The warrant will be forthcoming tomorrow."

"That will not do. I have committed no crime, and I shall not yield to you until you produce a legally issued warrant for my arrest!" rejoined Goldspur, sternly.

The deputy grew pale.

"You compel me to take you?" he asked.

"The gentleman does nothing of the kind; but you, Dick Dodds, compel me to take you!" interpolated a commanding voice, and a powerfully built stranger stepped forward, manacles in hand.

The deputy shrank back in sudden terror, and would have fallen but for the supporting arm of the Dandy Sport.

"The new marshal!" he gasped, hoarsely.

"Yes, I am the United States marshal for this district, Dick Dodds," was the stern response.

"Now, hand me your commission as deputy."

Dodds obeyed. The marshal glanced at the document, then thrust it into his pocket.

"You are relieved from duty," he announced. "There are serious charges pending against you, and you are now under arrest."

"Hold out your hands!"

Again Dick Dodds obeyed, then sank limply into a chair as the manacles closed around his wrists.

"Come, my man, this will not do," the marshal exclaimed, not unkindly. "You must brace up—there's a walk ahead."

"Goldspur, will you accompany us?"

"Willingly, Mr. Raymond," and the sport seized one of Dick Dodds's arms.

Then, under guidance of a miner, the two men hastened toward the calaboose with the prisoner.

"We'll get at the bottom of this matter presently, Goldspur," the marshal remarked, as they strode along.

CHAPTER X.

CHEROKEE CHARLIE'S MESSAGE.

The calaboose at Red Gulch was a stout log structure, and was divided into two apartments—one for the keeper, the other for the prisoners. It was located near the building occupied by Jubal Strong, the mayor, and was in charge of a tall and loose-jointed but extremely muscular fellow, known throughout the camps as Shocky Pete.

A resounding rap brought the jailor to the door, and he opened a small slide and cautiously peeped out.

"Who's thar?" he demanded, gruffly.

"Marshal Raymond, with a prisoner," was the reply.

Then a stout oaken bar rattled in its sockets, a chain clanked dismally, and the door swung open. The keeper turned up his light, and the party entered.

"Mush an' mack'el! Ef 'tain't Dick Dodds!" Shocky Pete exclaimed, running his hand through his bushy yellow hair in amazement. "What fer—"

"Never mind, now, Pete!" cut in the marshal, tersely. "Get a lamp and put the coop in order. It is almost morning, and we are in a hurry."

"All right, boss—I'm off!" and he disappeared into the rear room, lamp in hand.

The miner acting as guide had turned back at the door, and the United States marshal was alone with his prisoner and Goldspur.

"Now, Dodds," the officer exclaimed, seating the culprit on a stool and sitting down opposite to him, "I want you to make a clean breast of this matter."

"What induced you to charge Goldspur with outlawry?"

"I was told that he was a member of Cherokee Charlie's band," was the sullen reply.

"Who told you so?"

"I can't say."

"Can't, or won't?"

The prisoner's pallor deepened, and he shook his head doggedly.

"I did, or attempted to do, what I thought was my duty in the case," he returned, evasively.

"Was the man Elephant Eph?" the marshal persisted.

"No!"

"Nor young Grayson?"

"No, it wasn't Grayson."

Marshal Raymond reflected a moment, then turned to the Dandy Sport.

"Is there any question you would like to ask?" he inquired.

"I believe so—yes," and Goldspur's earnest voice sank almost to a whisper.

"What, Dick Dodds, was Judge Stamm's business with you to-night?"

This question was electrical in its effects. The prisoner started to his feet, then sank back, weak and trembling. But he quickly conquered his agitation.

"Who says I saw Judge Stamm to-night?" he retorted, defiantly.

"No matter, as to that. You did see him?"

"Oh, yes!"

"You went to his house in response to a summons delivered by one known as Weeping Mose?"

"Yes, sir," and Dick Dodds's defiant gaze wavered. "Yes, sir; I went to Stamm's house."

"Now, tell me for what purpose?"

The entrapped deputy pondered a moment. He was in a desperate predicament. If he betrayed Stamm, Stamm in turn would betray him. The cold sweat stood in beads upon his forehead.

"You are prying into my private affairs," he protested, bitterly. "My visit to Stamm did not and does not concern you in the least."

"Then he did not suggest or demand my arrest?"

"No, sir."

The Dandy Sport nodded crisply.

"That will do for the night, Dodds!" he exclaimed. "In a day or so, I may call again with our friend here, the marshal."

"When I come, I want you to explain just what hold Alex. Stamm has upon you."

"He—he has no such hold," the prisoner protested, uneasily.

"We shall see."

At that moment Shocky Pete appeared and announced that the prison was in readiness, and Dick Dodds was at once searched and locked up.

"Guard him closely, and let no one see him, save myself or Mr. Goldspur," ordered Marshal Raymond, impressively.

"If others call here for him note who they are and notify me of the facts."

The jailor nodded assent, and the marshal and the sport at once started back to the hotel.

"This Stamm is evidently a first-class scoundrel," Raymond remarked, as they strode along through the gloom. "I feel that my arrival in Red Gulch was very timely."

"It was indeed!" Goldspur heartily assented. "But for your presence, I would very likely now occupy Dodds's place. My only course was to yield. Resistance would have been worse than useless, for the rascals back of the deputy would have jumped at the chance to subject me to rough usage."

"Yes, that is true. Indeed, I suspect there was a design against your life, Goldspur."

"Possibly. I can hardly believe it, though. My chance encounter with Murat, and bringing him to camp, has made them suspicious and aroused their antagonism," the sport explained.

"They jumped to the conclusion that the mad man was the missing Gabriel Grayson, and that I was a detective, employed on the very case that brings you here, so they put their wits to work to get me out of Red Gulch."

Raymond seemed to accept this view of the matter. A moment later they entered the hotel, and at once learned of Murat's escape.

The landlord, when called upon, tersely stated the particulars.

"I reckon he took advantage of the guard's absence, and quietly slipped away," Goldspur remarked, in a matter-of-fact tone.

"Yes, that is the correct explanation," declared the landlord. "At first I was inclined to connect Cherokee Charlie's visit with his disappearance; but second thought convinced me that Murat departed of his own volition."

"Gold Dick and Trumps, the guards, were not absent from the hallway, and it would have been impossible, I judge, for any one even to have attempted the abduction of the old miner without detection."

Raymond smiled grimly.

"The guards may have sold out," he suggested.

"I can hardly believe that," averred the landlord. "Both are poor and pretty hard up, but bear excellent reputations."

"No, no! There is no cunning so deep, so subtle, as that of 'the mind diseased,' and I am willing to bet that Murat simply took advantage of the guard's negligence and stole away."

The Dandy Sport nodded assent to this view, and then the trio dismissed the subject.

A moment later the little gambler, Johnny June, appeared. He greeted the marshal and the sport pleasantly, and asked for a few words in private with Raymond.

The marshal readily assented, adding:

"We'll include our friend Mr. Goldspur, Mr. June. The fates seem bent on involving him in the Grayson case; and he'll do to tie to, I know."

"Just as you please, Mr. Raymond," nodded June, leading the way to a table in the corner. "We can sit down here, and a moment will do the business."

"I suppose you are here to meet Orrville Dubois?"

"That is my errand, in part. He is due here to-morrow."

"He will not arrive!"

"You surprise me, June!" exclaimed Raymond, visibly startled.

"I was surprised myself," the gambler returned.

"But here—read this note. It was handed one of my dealers a while ago, and explains all."

The marshal eagerly seized and opened the message, then in a low voice read:

"JOHN JUNE:—This is written at the urgent request of Orrville Dubois. I have just captured him while on his way to Red Gulch, and shall hold him for ransom. Will name the amount in a few days, and notify you where and how it is to be paid. If you love your friend, you will keep this thing very quiet. Dubois says that in the matter which called him to Red Gulch you may proceed as you think best, pending his release.

CHEROKEE CHARLIE."

"The infamous scoundrel!" ejaculated Raymond. "He is growing bold. I must select a number of deputies and see if I can discover his lair."

"Goldspur, I am going to press you into service!"

"And you, June, please act as Dubois requests. You are thoroughly familiar with the present status of the Grayson affair, and will know exactly what measures to take."

"Let Dubois's captivity remain a sealed secret for the present, and I think we shall unravel the tangle."

The Dandy Sport and the gambler assented to this latter proposition, and after a few minutes' talk the trio separated, each bent on securing much-needed sleep.

CHAPTER XI.

ELEPHANT EPH SEEKS TROUBLE.

It was almost noon when Goldspur awoke, sprang out of bed, and began leisurely to dress himself.

"By George!" he exclaimed, with a rueful look at his damaged hat. "That was a close call! An inch or two lower, and the bullet would have done the business!"

"The desperation shown by this secret cohort certainly goes to prove the madman's story true, and I firmly believe I am embarked on the most fortunate speculation I have ever struck!"

"A third-interest in a mine like the Rainbow is certainly better than living by one's wits, and I am going to do my level best to win it!"

"A hot hustle it will be, too, for the old man's foes are unscrupulous rogues, and have the advantage of virtual possession. It looks like rather big odds to tackle, but I've always had a pretty good opinion of myself, and I may be able to

show these fellows a trick or two they haven't had time to learn."

Thus communing with himself, until he had finished dressing, the Dandy Sport descended to the dining-room, where he was joined at table by Daniel Raymond, the United States marshal.

"I suppose you are ready to accept a commission as deputy, this morning?" the officer asked, after an exchange of greetings.

Goldspur shook his head.

"I am afraid I shall have to decline, Raymond," he replied. "I have an affair on hand which will compel my presence in or near Red Gulch for some little time."

"You refer to Murat?"

"Yes; he must be found."

The marshal smiled grimly. Then a peculiar expression came over his face, and he abruptly asked:

"What is Murat to you?"

"He is my pard."

"Your pard?"

"I have adopted him as such, so to speak."

"There is a mystery here, Goldspur!"

"No mystery at all, marshal."

"You have heard, I suppose, of my encounter with Murat last evening in Purgatory Pass?"

"Yes, and that is what puzzles me," Raymond declared. "He attempted to ambush and kill you. Now, why your extraordinary interest in him?"

Goldspur glanced about to assure himself they were alone, then in a low voice replied:

"There are two reasons, Marshal Raymond, and in strict confidence I shall tell you what they are."

"One is, that I firmly believe Murat is the long-missing Gabriel Grayson."

"The other is, I am in Murat's employ!"

Laying down knife and fork, Daniel Raymond looked sharply at the Dandy Sport.

"Goldspur!" he ejaculated; "if this is true, I begin to see the end of a romance—a romance begun years ago!"

The sport's face grew white and stern, and his blue eyes flashed brightly:

"Raymond, you are wrong," he coldly avowed. "You refer, I believe, to my rejection by Miss Grayson, and I say now that it was final."

"Pardon me! I meant not to wound," the marshal exclaimed, earnestly. "The circumstances are peculiar, and I jumped to a conclusion I should never have uttered."

"We'll let it pass at that. But understand, I am not seeking to win favor in the eyes of Miss Grayson. She is a grand girl—a splendid girl, but the gulf between us is too wide ever to be bridged. And it is better so, for I am a roving blade, ill-content to assume the cares of home or family."

"To put the matter plainly and in its proper light, my interest in the matter is purely mercenary."

"Murat's madness is of a peculiar type. He has lucid intervals—brief and fleeting, it is true, yet intervals when he is as sane as either you or I. Directly after I overpowered him, one of those spells manifested itself, and we talked for upward of an hour. Just what was said need not be repeated; it will answer that his story impressed me strongly, and that we there and then entered into a compact."

Raymond had listened attentively. When Goldspur finished, he shook his head vigorously.

"I fear you are following a will-o'-the-wisp," he asserted, candidly. "Gabriel Grayson has certainly been dead several years. You can do much better service by lending your energies to Dubois's campaign against the unscrupulous gang now seeking to rob the old man's heirs."

"You may be correct, marshal; but I am honor-bound to Murat, and I shall stick to him, win or lose."

"I trust, too, Raymond, that you will not breathe a word of that affair to any one. I wish to work in secret, so far as possible."

"No hint of it shall pass my lips," the marshal assured.

"And, now, Goldspur, there is another point I want to touch upon—this quarrel of yours with young Grayson."

"It is causing no end of talk in the camp, and I would earnestly advise you to accept an apology from him."

"It is said you made an ugly threat—"

"I did so, sir! In fact, my words were those of a thoroughly angry man!" the Dandy Sport interrupted. "But that threat had a meaning vastly different from the one so generally accepted, and which time alone can make clear."

"Mere words cannot efface the sting of a blow, yet when Conrad Grayson comes to me with an apology, I shall accept it."

"I am glad to hear you say that," the marshal heartily declared, rising from the table. "And I certainly wish you luck in your chimerical venture."

"We're off, now, on our hunt for Cherokee Charlie. When I return, I'll look you up."

Then the officer nodded and strode quickly out of the place, and Goldspur was alone.

There was a peculiar look upon the face of the sport. The words of the marshal had revived old memories and brought to mind scenes long forgotten.

"I am a fool!" he muttered, angrily rising from the table. "The past is buried, and shall remain so."

"Now, for that new hat, and then I'll try to strike Murat's trail."

Passing quickly out of the hotel, Goldspur looked up and down the street, then singled out the establishment of Jubal Strong.

"That's the leading place," he decided. "I'll try the mayor first."

But at that moment a wild yell of terror rang out hard by, and a decrepit old man hobbled quickly around the corner of an adjacent building.

"Help! help!" he cried, his cracked old voice quivering with fear. "He will kill me!"

Then the huge form of Elephant Eph came into view, in swift pursuit.

"Stop, you miserable old fraud! Stop, or I'll pound your head off!" shouted the gambler, savagely.

And with a desperate lunge he grasped the fugitive by the collar, shook him viciously, and hurled him to the ground.

The Dandy Sport leaped forward.

"Hold on, here!" he ordered, in an authoritative voice, as he sprang directly between the two men.

"Keep hand and hoof off that old man, you cowardly bully!"

Elephant Eph recoiled before this unlooked-for interference, and his face grew red with rage.

"And what'll you do about it, you impudent puppy?" he snarled. "This is the second time you've butted into my game, and it won't happen again!"

"I'm cock of the walk in this here camp, and I don't allow any shoestrapping sport to monkey with my business!"

"Oh! you don't?" retorted Goldspur, a scornful smile disclosing his gleaming teeth. "You're a mighty chief—a kind of human cyclone, with buzzsaw attachment, and all that sort of thing—to hear you tell it!"

"But I don't agree with you. To my notion, you're simply a vicious overgrown brute! And your actions, so far as I have seen them, show that you are not only a miserable thief, but an arrant coward!"

A buzz of astonishment went up from the crowd which had quickly gathered, and all stared at the audacious sport in open-mouthed wonder, while the old man, the victim of Elephant Eph's fury, crept away, whining and whimpering.

"Now, I mean just what I say, Elephant Eph!" Goldspur continued. "I think, too, that a sandy man just about my size could lick you within an inch of your life!"

This last fling was more than the gambler could endure. Throwing off his coat, he uttered a wolfish snarl and leaped straight at the Dandy Sport!

CHAPTER XII.
DADDY PARKER.

Although thoroughly angered by Elephant Eph's cruel abuse of the old man, Goldspur was not to be caught off his guard. Deftly throwing aside his coat, he eluded that vicious rush, then dealt the bully a stinging blow on the ear.

A fresh gasp of astonishment came from the crowd—a grunt of pain from the gambler.

"Hurrah!" yelled Jubal Strong, forgetting his official dignity and dancing gleefully. "Give the big scamp a drubbing!"

"Yes, yes! Hooray! hooray!" echoed the crowd, pleased beyond measure at the bully's evident discomfiture.

Now wild with rage, Elephant Eph whirled quickly and again dashed savagely at the sport, confident that, could he grapple Goldspur, his superior weight and strength would give him the victory.

But the Dandy Sport, quick to divine his purpose, sprang forward, met his huge antagonist halfway, and with a sinuous, serpentine play of his arms, rained a series of blows on face, neck and chest, driving the gambler bully backward, step by step. Then a bewildering feint, followed by a terrific drive straight from the shoulder, and the brief battle was ended.

The bully of Red Gulch was a whipped man. His reign of terror was ended, and nearly every man in the crowd yelled with delight as he realized the fact.

In a moment, the Dandy Sport was caught up and whirled to a position upon the broad shoulders of Trumps and Gold Dick, and an impromptu procession started up the winding street of the camp!

"Three cheers for the Dandy Sport!" yelled Mayor Jubal Strong, wildly swinging his hat, and as three cheers and a tiger rent the air he sprang forward to lead the enthusiastic crowd.

Goldspur's triumph was a notable one. Elephant Eph, backed by powerful and unscrupulous pards, had long been a terror to the denizens of Red Gulch, many of whom had suffered at his hands. Overbearing, coarse, brutal, he had been at once detested and feared, and this unexpected release from his despotic sway, so long hoped for and so long delayed, was hailed with extravagant manifestations of delight.

No one was more surprised than Goldspur himself at this turn of affairs; but, finding vigorous protests useless, he accepted the situation in a good-natured way, and was borne laughing to the upper end of the camp, and thence to the starting point, where he was permitted to descend, though not to escape.

"You're a chief, and no mistake," the delighted Strong declared, pushing through the crowd and grasping Goldspur's hand. "As mayor of Red Gulch, I want to tender you congratulations and the camp's thanks for the licking given Elephant Eph."

"For months past, he's been a terror, and has killed or whipped every man in camp possessed of the temerity to resent his insolence and brutality."

"You surprise me!" exclaimed the sport. "I had taken him to be a different sort of chap—merely a cowardly bully."

"Oh, no! He's really a bad man—a regular desperado," the mayor assured. "His record is a bloody one, and as he has a large following and is backed by such men as Judge Stamm, it has been found impossible thus far to bring him to justice."

"Yas, yas! thet's ther gospel truth, May'r Strong!"

"An' he'll kill you, too, sport!"

"Oh, he oughter hang!"

These cries and many others of similar import came from the men gathered around, and Goldspur was forced to the conclusion that he had made an extremely dangerous enemy.

But the Dandy Sport was an utter stranger to fear, and the men of Red Gulch marveled at the cool indifference with which he seemed to accept the situation.

Then they crowded forward, one by one, to grasp his hand and assure him of their friendship, and in a few minutes he found himself alone with the mayor, Gold Dick and Trumps.

From the two miners Goldspur at once received an account of Murat's escape, together with a report of non-success in their effort to find the Mad Miner's trail for Dick Dodds, and while he listened it occurred to the sport that the two men might be useful to him, and he determined secretly to employ them.

So he bargained with them to go out and bring in his traps, which, owing to his capture of Murat, he had been compelled to leave behind in a small ledge cavern, the preceding night.

"I will meet you at the Gold-Bar Palace at nine to-night, and there settle with you for the trip," he said, in conclusion, and Trumps and Gold Dick at once hurried away, while Goldspur and the mayor entered the latter's store.

It required but a few minutes to replace the damaged hat with a new one, and the sport had turned to leave when Jubal Strong touched him upon the arm.

"I want to give you a word of warning, here in private," the mayor explained. "It's about Elephant Eph, too!"

"The scoundrel is Stamm's right-hand man, and if I am not greatly mistaken they will attempt to give you trouble before you are many hours older."

"Of course, as an officer of the law, I cannot openly advise the shedding of blood; but if a hint's enough, you'll buckle on a brace of good revolvers and proceed to give Eph his everlasting quietus as soon as you meet him."

"You need have no fear of any tangle with the law; on the contrary, I assure you that you'll come clear, and earn a neat sum to boot."

The Dandy Sport was surprised. Not only surprised, but disgusted. He could not help feeling that the mayor was attempting to use him as a cat's-paw.

"I do not think there will be any occasion to follow the course you suggest," he returned. "To be frank with you, I abhor the shedding of blood, and in no case would I take life, except to save my own."

"Elephant Eph has not so much as breathed a threat against my life, so far as I know, and assuredly I do not propose to go out and hunt him down as I would a wild beast."

Jubal Strong turned red.

"You mistake my meaning," he assured. "There is no particular reason why I should desire the life of that scoundrel, much as I detest him."

"I was simply giving you a bit of friendly caution, for I am morally sure that Eph will attack you."

"Now I wash my hands of the whole affair, and you may do as you please."

"Certainly, certainly!" the sport lightly responded, and he walked out of the store.

Not ten steps had he gone, however, when he came face to face with the old man, the defenseless victim of the bully's wrath.

"Ah, sir! it is you, sir?" the old fellow exclaimed, stretching out a palsied hand. "I'm Daddy Parker, the chap you saved from a drubbing a bit ago—a mighty good drubbing, too, sir!"

The sport shook hands, and asked:

"Were you hurt? What was the trouble?"

"Hurt some, sir—yes, sir. Years knock out nimbleness, sir, and old bones are stiff. I've sixty-nine years to my credit, sir, and my bones are old; yes, sir—very old; and when one's old a fall counts."

"And then the trouble, sir. That's a family matter—a family matter, sir."

"Excuse me! I—"

"Not necessary, sir—not necessary at all. There are no secrets in the family, sir, and only one skeleton in the closet. And that one got in, sir, when Gabe went off a-larkin' and never came back. He did that, sir, sure as my name's Daddy Parker!"

"But I—"

"No hurry, sir—no hurry at all!" rattled the old man. "It's a peculiar thing, sir. There was Gabe—he was Con's daddy, sir, just as sure's I'm Con's uncle. And then there's Con, sir; he's gambling. Yes, sir, gambling—and there's the trouble, sir."

Goldspur started.

"Meaning Con Grayson, I presume?" he queried.

"Exactly, sir—Con Grayson. And they're robbing him—robbing him night after night, sir. Wife and I talked it over, and I decided to act. To that end, sir, I approached Elephant Eph, and ventured to expostulate. That was it, sir; I expostulated."

"Yes?"

"He grew angry, sir," the old man continued, his tones quickening. "He attempted chastisement. He put me to flight. And you, sir—you know what followed. You have my heartiest and best thanks for interfering, sir, for I should have fared badly."

"But the end is not yet, sir—not yet!" and Daddy Parker, looking around cautiously, sank his voice almost to a whisper and continued:

"Elephant Eph went direct to Stamm's office. Stamm, sir, is a villain. Knowing this, I followed the gambler. I overheard a great deal of the talk that passed between them, sir—yes, sir, a great deal!"

"You are to be made to suffer."

"They swore, sir, to put your life in jeopardy before the night is done!"

CHAPTER XIII.

THE MINER-DETECTIVES.

Promptly at nine o'clock that night, Gold Dick and Trumps appeared at the Gold-Bar Palace, where they found the Dandy Sport seated behind a table in a deserted corner of the room.

"Come, pards, sit down!" Goldspur requested, in his pleasant, off-hand way. "The traps, I know, are all right, for I have examined them, and here is your pay."

"You are both looking for work, I believe?"

"Oh, yas, an' hungry fer it, too," Gold Dick replied, as he and his pard sat down at the table.

"That we is," chimed in Trumps. "We've hardly 'arned our grub money in ther last two months."

"That is singular, men, for they tell me the camp is prosperous and labor scarce."

The miners exchanged glances and seemed ill at ease.

"You've hit ther truth plumb center, pard sport!" Gold-Dick blurted, doggedly. "Times aire good in Red Gulch, but not fer men on ther Rainbow's blacklist."

"The Rainbow's blacklist?"

"So I said, pard sport."

"That is something I had not heard of, Gold Dick, so please explain your meaning," Goldspur requested, with interest visibly deepened.

"It's a hard thing to explain," was the serious response. "All we know is thet when a man displeases Stamm, he is discharged; thet ends his work at ther Rainbow, an' so we says he's on ther blacklist."

"But there are other mines in camp?"

"Oh, yes; but they aire small, an' employ but few men, an' Stamm's influence goes ag'inst us."

"Thet's a fact," Trumps supplemented. "We've tried all ther mines in camp, an' they all asks fer a recommendation f'm Stamm."

"That is certainly a striking example of one-man power," was the sport's remark.

"But why were you discharged, Gold Dick?"

"I know too much," was the significant reply. "Ther output was bein' cut ter shrink ther mine's value."

"You are sure of that?"

"It's as sartin as death an' taxes, pard sport!"

"Can you prove it?"

Both miners shook their heads, but there was a hopeful gleam in Gold Dick's black eyes.

"Not jest yet," he replied. "But we hopes to, soon, Mr. Goldspur."

"You hope to, eh?"

"Yas, sir."

"Men, I do not understand you!" and Goldspur assumed a mystified look. "How can you find such proof when you are debarred from the Rainbow?"

Gold Dick looked at Trumps, and asked:

"Shall I say it all, right out, pard?"

"You bet!" Trumps decided.

"Wal, then, Mr. Goldspur," Gold Dick went on, "we have a pard in ther mine."

"A pard in the Rainbow?"

"Yas, sir; a darky pard, an' he's cunning es a fox."

"He should be of great assistance to you, Gold Dick, but will not be able to furnish you complete proof."

"We knew that, pard sport, an' it bothered us a heap, so we put our heads together an' decided to play detective."

"Ha! Man, you interest me!" Goldspur admitted. "You have discovered something, I suppose?"

"So far, on'y thet Stamm is keepin' mighty bad company."

"That is a point scored. It may lead to something. Now, let us see if I understand you," and the sport's tone grew confidential.

"You were discharged and blacklisted, you say, because you knew too much?"

"Yas, sir; that's the lay-out."

"How did Stamm learn of this dangerous knowledge?"

"He heer'd us talkin' one night, an' we were bounded next day."

"What interest had you in the matter?"

"Pard, we hated ter see ther Graysons robbed—thet was all."

Goldspur smiled grimly.

"That is singular! They are rich, you poor! Why should you risk discharge by prying into the affair?"

An angry, suspicious gleam came into Gold Dick's eyes, and he curtly said:

"Not fer any reward, ef thet's what you hint, pard sport!"

"I am not hinting," the Dandy Sport retorted. "I asked a question for you to answer. Will you oblige me?"

"Sart'n! We did it fer Miss Grayson."

"At her request?"

"No! You see, sport, thet gal is jest an angel—lackin' wings, o' course! Last winter, Trumps an' me hed ther fevers, an' she nussed us same as a sister or a mammy, an' we hain't fergot. Thet's all."

Goldspur nodded. His eyelids twitched, and Trumps fancied he detected a slight change of color.

But whatever the sport's emotions may have been, he sternly repressed them and held to the subject, asking:

"You acted out of gratitude, then?"

"Could we see ther gal robbed an' not try ter ketch ther thief?" the miner demanded, indignantly.

"No; you would have deserved to hang had you done so!" was the stern rejoinder.

"You informed Miss Grayson of Stamm's crookedness, I suppose?"

"No; we on'y went to May'r Strong."

"Why to Strong?"

"Thar war two reasons, Pard Goldspur. First, he is mayor o' ther camp; an' then it is said he is to marry Miss Grayson. Sech bein' ther case, he'd not see her interests suffer."

"I should think not," the sport remarked in a peculiar tone.

"Do you think other miners in the Rainbow have knowledge of this crookedness?"

"No," and Gold Dick explained an accident by which he and Trumps had come into possession of the facts.

The Dandy Sport listened closely. That he was deeply interested in the miner's revelations he did not try to conceal.

"Now, men," he urged, when the recital was ended, "tell me why you have come to me with this story of Stamm's crookedness?"

The miners looked at each other, and both shook their heads.

"I don't know," Gold Dick confessed, in confusion. "But I reckon it war becase you licked Elephant Eph to-day."

"Thet war jest it," acquiesced Trumps, emphatically. "We figgered ef ye w'u'dn't see an old man hurted by ther bully, ye w'u'dn't see a woman robbed by thet rascal Stamm."

"You are right there, Trumps; I don't intend to see Miss Grayson robbed," Goldspur averred, in a decided way. "Stamm must be balked. You and Gold Dick and your darkey pard must help me do the trick."

"Count on ther three of us, Pard Goldspur!" the miners volunteered, eagerly.

"Keep up your detective work, then," urged the sport. "Draw on me for fifty dollars a month and expenses, for each of you. Let me know all that you learn, but keep still tongues and be very cautious. No one must know that I have any connection whatever with the matter."

"We'll do jest what you say," Gold Dick assured.

"Then you can begin work at once, and must obey orders to the letter. Let your darkey pard remain in the mine, but have him keep eyes and ears open."

"You, Trumps, must shadow Con Grayson. Hunt him up and begin at once, but use great care."

"And you, Dick—suppose you keep an eye on Stamm, to-night?"

"Lordy, boss! I'm clean stumped right now!" the miner informed him. "Stamm left late in ther afternoon, on ther buss. An' they say he'll be gone mebbe two or three weeks!"

"So-ho! That is unfortunate. But, the matter cannot be remedied now. While he is absent, you may give your attention to Elephant Eph."

Then the Dandy Sport arranged a brief code of signals for use in an emergency.

That done, Gold Dick and Trumps rose and departed.

"So Stamm has gone," the Sport mused, as his miner-detectives disappeared. "It is a singular move to make, just at this time. It looks bad!"

"By George! I'll investigate!"

Goldspur was not given to waiting. With him, an action decided upon was an action begun. Rising, he hastened to his room.

CHAPTER XIV.

HERCULES REDROCK.

Something like two hours before the appearance of Trumps and Gold Dick to keep their appointment with Goldspur, a tall, heavily-muscled man, roughly dressed and wearing a full red beard and long, curling red hair, rode into camp on the Paradise Bar trail, dismounted, and hitched his clean-limbed roan to the rack in front of the Gold-Bar Palace.

It was not quite dark, and the loungers about the place gazed curiously at the stranger.

"Har-har!" he laughed, as he noticed their sharp glances, the white teeth filling his wide mouth gleaming brightly through his drooping red mustaches. "Har-har! Git a good squint, pards! Et don't cost nothin', an' yer lookin' at su'thin' wu'th seein'!"

"I'm ther on'y an' 'riginal Hercules Redrock!—you bet! I'm ther prize beauty f'm Brimstone Butte, an' no man dust say 'tain't so!"

"Har-har-har! Har-ar-ar!"

There was something peculiarly infectious in that cachination, and the crowd joined heartily in the laugh, then good-naturedly parted, right and left, to permit the stranger to enter the hotel.

Hercules Redrock strode up the steps and straight into the barroom, the huge spurs upon the heels of his rawhide boots jingling noisily with each step.

Just inside the swinging doors shutting off the hotel office, he paused, and,

with hands upon hips, looked around expectantly. A moment thus, then he elevated his nose in a manner expressive of supreme disgust.

"Wal, I berdern!" he ejaculated, loudly.

"What is it, my friend? What is the trouble?" the landlord asked, his attention instantly attracted by the red-bearded stranger's expressive action.

"Be you ther boss o' this hyar corral?"

"I have that honor, my friend—yes, sir."

"An' this hyar hangout is ther Gold-Bar Palace, I takes et?"

"Yes, sir; you are correct."

"Wal, I'm blamed ef 'tain't ther biggest swindle I've struck in a multitude o' y'ars!"

The landlord's face grew red, and in tones of suppressed fury he exclaimed:

"What do you mean, sir? You are insulting!"

"Thet's all right, lan'lord," was the cool retort. "Don't ye go fer to explode, fer by gum! no bluffs goes with Hercules Redrock!"

"Thet's my handle—har-har! Hercules Redrock—you bet! An' I'm all ther way f'm Brimstone Butte, jest ter be taken in an' done fer by ther Gold-Bar Palace!"

"Lan'lord, et's a gospel fact we sharps up thar hev always heerd yer bar war solid gold, an' thet ther sports o' this hyar camp drunk their leetle forty drops o' honey-dew outer gold goblets crusted with dimints an' sech-like valuable stuns!"

"An' now thet sech ain't ther case, I da'sn't go back ter Brimstone an' 'low thet I've bin took in."

The landlord listened with visible astonishment.

"What an idea!" he exclaimed. "I am sorry you are disappointed, my friend Redrock, but you see before you the very best I can afford."

"This establishment takes its name from a large gold bar we keep on exhibition. This bar is twelve inches long, four wide and four deep, and represents a large amount of money."

"It is bedded two and one-half inches deep in solid cement, and it is a standing offer of the house to present the bar to the man who can lift it out of the cement with his naked hands!"

Hercules Redrock's eyes opened wide in amazement.

"Oh-ho! oh-ho! Ye don't say!" he ejaculated. "Lan'lord, aire ye givin' me gospel fact?"

"Oh, yes, sir," the landlord assured. "I am stating the truth. Several hundred men have tried to win the treasure, but so far all have failed."

"An' ets solid gold, ye say?"

"It is gold, pure and unalloyed."

"Kin I git my hooks on et?"

"If you ante."

"How much?"

"Ten dollars."

"No bluff goes with Hercules Redrock, by gum! You trot out yer bar, an' hyar's yer money!" the stranger exclaimed, pulling out a big roll of bills and selecting a note of the right denomination. "Har-har! I'll jest bet I gobbles ther trick!"

"It is extremely doubtful, my friend. Hundreds have tried and failed. One of these days, some sport will succeed in lifting it, but it will likely be a long time before that occurs."

"However, there is always a chance, or we would not accept your money."

At that moment two attendants appeared, bearing the gold bar. As stated, it was imbedded in cement, and was surrounded by a heavy oak frame.

"Mr. Redrock, the chance for fortune is before you," the landlord announced, as the attendants carefully lowered the frame to the floor. "Remember, you are to stand on the platform, and are to use nothing but your naked hands. The test is limited to five minutes."

"Hooray!" yelled Redrock. Then he carefully removed his coat, stepped on

the platform, stooped and grasped the yellow bar.

Forming a ring, the spectators anxiously watched the play of the stranger's sinewy fingers.

Suddenly, a faint, crackling sound was heard. Then a wild yell rang through the hotel, and Hercules Redrock sprang back and held the golden treasure high above his head.

Where hundreds had failed, he had won!

"Har-har-har!" he laughed, leaping madly about. "Keep back, you kiotes!—g'ime elbow room, won't ye?"

There was a snarl in the last words. Shifting his hold on the treasure, Redrock drew and brandished a long and dangerous-looking knife.

"Landlord, I wants ther best room in yer house fer two weeks," he announced, quietly. "I want it at once, too."

The boniface, dazed by his unexpected loss, silently picked up the stranger's coat, and led the way up-stairs.

That was the last seen of the red-bearded stranger for several hours. A call to supper was unheeded, and many were the conjectures excited by his absence.

About ten o'clock, however, he smilingly descended the stairs, entered the bar-room, and greeted the crowd in his characteristic style.

A brace of heavy revolvers now bore the long knife company in his cartridge-studded belt, and his appearance was such as to command the immediate respect of the rough men thronging the place.

Much to the disappointment of many of the loungers, Hercules Redrock contented himself with purchasing a few cigars, then passed quietly out into the street.

A glance up and down the winding, moonlit thoroughfare seemed to reassure him. He singled out a distant light, and strode rapidly toward it.

He walked with a free and swinging step that covered the ground rapidly, and in a few minutes brought up in front of a barn-like structure, from a corner window of which shone a bright light.

"Hyar's ther lay-out, fer a mortal fact," he muttered, in a tone seemingly expressive of relief, as he slowly read the rude sign extending across the front of the building, and he threw open a door and entered.

"This hyar's ther stage company's office, I take et?" he exclaimed, addressing the single occupant of the box-like office.

"Yas, sir-ree, stranger," was the drawling reply.

"But I reckons you're jest about eight hours too late fer ther buss. She pulled her Big Nugget Camp at three o'clock, lays over to-night at Devil's Bend, an' finishes ther run ter-morrer."

"Har-har. Thet's a joke on me!" Redrock exclaimed, with his peculiar laugh. "When does the next one leave this hyer burg?"

"Day arter ter-morrer."

"Kin I book fer ther trip now?"

"You bet! Ante, an' put yer name an' jump-off place right thar," and the stableman shoved the open register forward, with grimy forefinger laid upon a vacant line.

Hercules Redrock laid down a bill, and looked askance at the book. Then he seized the pen and slowly and laboriously scrawled his name and destination.

But his eyes were not upon his task; neither were they idle. Each name upon that blurred and blotted page came beneath their keen and searching glance.

"Thar!" he exclaimed, his blue eyes twinkling brightly as he pushed the book away. "Thar! I've worked ther trick at last. Har-har!"

Then he received his change, conversed with the stableman a moment, and departed, bending his leisurely steps in the direction of the hotel corral.

CHAPTER XV.

THE RAINBOW ROGUES.

Judge Stamm, it will be remembered, was in a towering rage when he left the Grayson cottage, immediately after his abrupt and emphatic dismissal at the hands of Agatha.

His face was flushed, and his dark eyes held a wrathful glow as he descended the winding driveway leading from the cottage to the road. Incoherent mutterings fell from his lips, and his appearance was little short of maniacal.

But when he neared the street he suppressed his passions, and by sheer force of will assumed a smiling mien.

"It will never do to let the gossips of Red Gulch detect me in such a mood," he mused. "Now that the time for decisive action has come, there must be nothing in my appearance to excite suspicion."

Then he emerged from the driveway and strode rapidly along the road toward the upper end of the camp.

Not a hundred yards had he gone, however, when ringing hoof-strokes sounded behind him, and a moment later a wiry, well-knit man, evidently a half-blood, mounted on a mettlesome mustang, swept past him.

No word was exchanged, but an expressive glance passed from one to the other. Stamm brought his hands sharply together; the horseman nodded, wheeled his mustang, and with roweling spurs dashed swiftly away.

An exultant look, fiendish in its wicked intensity, crossed the mine-manager's face. Changing his course, he proceeded straight to the Rainbow office, a small frame building standing just inside the stockade surrounding the mine entrance.

This building was divided into two apartments, the first and larger one being used for the general business of the mine, while the other served as a private office for the manager.

Stamm strode briskly into the outer office, and glanced around. The bookkeeper, Simeon Paully, was present, but Con Grayson had not yet arrived.

"Good-morning, Simeon," the judge greeted in his unctious way. "I perceive that our young friend is, as usual, far from punctual."

The bookkeeper, an extremely thin, pale and youngish-looking man, with watery blue eyes and a pinkish nose, returned the greeting, and solemnly added:

"Alas, no! I fear, sir, the youth is goin' to ruin!"

"I have certainly exerted my whole influence to turnin' him from his evil ways, but he willfully persists in follerin' the paths of the ungodly."

"You speak truly, Simeon—that I shall always insist!" Stamm responded, with equal gravity. "I, too, have striven hard to wean him from his waywardness, but vainly."

Then both scoundrels groaned and shook their heads sadly.

At that moment a shining black face appeared in the open window, and the cause of the lugubrious by-play was disclosed.

"Mornin', Marsa Stamm!" the owner of the face greeted, with a broad grin. "Mighty fine mornin', sah."

"Yes, Darcy Dan, the weather is all that could be desired."

"But you may put away your white-wash brush, and step in here. I have several errands for you to do immediately."

Darcy Dan promptly obeyed. Stamm, having hastily invented the errands, explained them, then watched the servitor pass beyond the stockade gates.

"I am getting more and more suspicious of that fellow," he finally remarked, turning to Simeon Paully.

"Discharge him," piped the bookkeeper, briskly.

"Confound it! I hardly dare do it,

just yet. The girl insists that he shall have employment here."

"Then keep him at work outside the stockade."

"Yes, I can do that. I've been suspicious of him since I overheard that conversation between Trumps and Gold Dick and discharged them. He is their friend."

"And should have been let off with them."

"Assuredly! But I wasn't as wise then as I am now, Simeon, my boy! You see, it was several days before I got the idea into my head that the darky was nosing around in the mine too much, and brought him up to work around the office."

Simeon shook his head, stuck his pen behind his ear, and stepped away from the desk.

"I don't want him hangin' around here," he declared, with pronounced acerbity of tone and manner. "He was under the window when Eph came in this mornin' with a note to discount. I am afraid he heard somethin'."

The manager started guiltily.

"Eph here?" he exclaimed.

"Yes, sir. He says the jig is up. There was trouble last night. He was caught cheatin' by a stranger in camp, called Goldspur."

"Curses!" cried Stamm, angrily. "Why could not Raymond have remained away a few days longer? With Dodds in hoc, I fear I shall have to resort to desperate measures to get rid of that spy."

"You took the note, Simeon, and gave Eph the money?"

"No, I told him to call later in the day, as the amount was unusually large."

"That was right. I think I can scale him down. He has had fat picking. By George! every cent counts!" and the penurious rascal smiled grimly.

"And now, Simeon, you may get things in shape for me to leave."

"You are going on the stage to-day?"

"Yes; you will be in charge during my absence. See that the men put in full time. You had better issue an order for a general cut of ten per cent., too."

"The men will strike," Simeon suggested.

"Let them. Labor is plentiful, and we can put the discontented rascals on the blacklist."

The book-keeper heartily assented to this proposition. Then he turned to the safe, drew out a check book, and quickly filled out a check for one hundred dollars.

"Here's an item to add to the expense account," he remarked, handing the check to Stamm for his signature.

"What's this for?" the manager asked in surprise.

Simeon Paully grinned. He stroked his thin, straw-colored mustaches complacently.

"My doctor has ordered me to use a bisickle," he replied. "I want to forward the check for one to-day."

"You don't expect the Rainbow Mining Company to pay for it?"

"Certainly—though the books would never show it."

Judge Stamm shook his head sullenly, and handed the paper back to the bookkeeper.

"You destroy that at once," he ordered. "I'm not going to be bled."

Simeon Paully quietly ignored the check. A peculiar whitish look had crept into his face, and his watery blue eyes emitted a greenish glint.

"You see, there are a good many things the books don't show," he continued. "They are like the shafts of a mine—they can be twisted so they don't always foller the true veins."

"But all that's neither here nor there. I started to tell you about my doctor's orders. He says I must use a bisickle. He also recommends that I go South. I know several first-class book-keepers there; I hear they get as much as five thousand dollars a year."

Stamm scowled darkly.

"Are you a first-class man?" he demanded, sneeringly.

"They say knowledge is power. I possess knowledge," was the significant reply.

Stepping to the desk, Stamm seized a pen and signed the check.

"Let this be the last of it, Simeon Paully," he growled, handing over the coveted paper. "You may find it dangerous business."

"And the increase in salary?"

"You must get along as you are or quit. I can find another man for your place at the pay you get."

"Very good; get him! I resign at once!"

Judge Stamm started and changed color.

"Hold on, Simeon, my boy!" he expostulated, his tone changing. "Don't be rash! You must remain with the Rainbow Company!"

"And the salary, Judge Stamm?"

"Well—well, Simeon, you are extremely harsh in your demands! They are ill-timed. The company is tottering—fairly tottering! Can't you reconsider, for the time being?"

"No, sir! I must have the increase now."

Stamm rubbed his hands briskly. He smiled blandly, and nodded.

"Very good, Simeon, my boy!" he exclaimed. "Your service has always been satisfactory, and you shall have the increase, great as it is!"

So saying, the manager strode into his private office, and closed the door with a bang.

Simeon Paully smiled triumphantly. Then he stepped behind his desk, silently unlocked a drawer, and drew out a rubber tube. It was probably thirty inches long. One end was fitted with a hollow nipple, the other with a flaring ear-piece.

The end of the high desk was some four inches from the partition wall. Thrusting his hand into this space, Simeon deftly attached the nipped end of the tube to a pipe hidden in the wall.

A hook in the end of the desk gave support to the loose end of the tube, and Simeon Paully turned to his books with a great deal of satisfaction.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE BLACK DETECTIVE.

While really a skilled accountant, Simeon Paully was lamentably ignorant along many lines. But his cunning was fine, his egotism great. He was a born scoundrel.

Now that the manager had yielded to his demands, he determined to be even more watchful and prying. Nothing should loosen the grip he had obtained.

Shortly after Stamm retired to the rear room, Con Grayson entered the office.

"Good-mornin', Mr. Grayson," the book-keeper greeted, with a deferential smirk. "You are a-lookin' unusually well this mornin'."

"Am I, really, Polly?" the youth returned, ungraciously. "I should say those gimlet eyes of yours need straightening. I'm anything but well. I'm in a fit of the blues."

"Has Stamm come in yet?"

Simeon silently pointed to the rear room. Con entered and shut the door.

Pushing an open ledger to the end of the desk, the book-keeper mounted his stool. Then he reached down, lifted the rubber tube from the hook, and applied the end to his ear.

Every word uttered beyond the partition was distinctly audible.

"You are late again this morning, Conrad," Stamm was saying, in a tone of mild reproof.

"Oh, yes; I was out late last night," the youth returned.

"You were playing again, and had trouble, I understand."

"Yes; a stranger in camp detected

Elephant Eph cheating, and the game broke up in a row."

"You lost again?"

"Yes—heavily."

"So I was informed," and Stamm frowned. "Eph was here, bright and early, with another of your notes."

"I shall contest payment! He has been robbing me!"

"You are too late, my boy. Simeon settled the matter," Stamm declared.

Con seemed nettled.

"I don't like this business at all," he exclaimed. "I feel that I have been robbed out of a big lot of money, and I intend to make matters exceedingly hot for Elephant Eph and those back of him."

"In other words, you're going to squeal," suggested Stamm, blandly.

"Hang it! No! I don't mean it that way, judge, and you know it," Con protested. "But I've been robbed from first to last, and I'm going to get satisfaction."

"Are you going to do violence?"

"I don't know. That remains to be seen."

Stamm maintained a thoughtful silence for several minutes.

"I have long marveled at your losing," he observed, at length. "You won steadily for a while, and I have always understood that you play a really brilliant game."

"Your father, as I may have remarked to you, was in early days conceded to be the greatest player in the camp, and I have rather fancied that his mantle would descend to you."

"My skill and my judgment are all right," Con boastfully declared. "But all the skill and judgment in the world amount to nothing when you get into a rogue's game."

"That is true," the judge assented. "But you are on your guard, now, and the rascals will hardly dare attempt anything of the kind soon again."

"We must make a desperate effort to get some of this money back."

"I am going away to-day, as you know, but I tell you what I'll do. I'll leave a thousand dollars of my own money with Simeon. You get it from him to-night, and attempt to recoup your losses."

The youth's face flushed, and his eyes sparkled brightly. Then he suddenly grew sober, and shook his head.

"It won't do," he declared. "Suppose I should lose?"

"You must not lose. But should that happen, you shall have your own time in which to pay me. Limit yourself to the thousand, and don't make any more notes, for they have to be paid, or your name dishonored."

"Now, get my horse and take a long ride—say to Devil's Bend and back. It will keep you out of mischief during the day, and will steady your nerves for to-night."

"By George! I'll do it," the youth exclaimed, jubilantly. "Judge, you're a brick!"

At that moment Simeon deftly replaced the tube over the hook in the end of the desk, dipped his pen in ink and applied himself to the ledger. Con had started toward the door, followed by Stamm.

"I'll not get back in time to see you off," the youth continued, as they entered the outer office, "but my good wishes go with you."

"Thank you," was the manager's terse response.

"Simeon, before I start, I'll place a package of money in the safe. When Con returns this evening, hand it to him."

"Yes, sir."

Con waited to hear no more, but hurried from the office to secure the horse and be off. His heart beat high with hope, and he felt that his treacherous guardian was a friend indeed.

Leaving the youth to his uneventful ride, we will follow the movements of Stamm.

His departure from Red Gulch at this time was not prompted by the demands of business. It was simply a precautionary move. A crisis was at hand, and for reasons best known to himself he preferred to be absent when the crash came.

Calling Simeon into the private office, the manager closed the door, and the two sat down to the confidential discussion of a project at once dark and villainous.

Scarcely had the door closed, however, when a shining black face came slowly into view above the sill of the open window. A glance assured the spy that the outer office was deserted, and with the stealth of a huge cat Ducky Dan swung himself lightly into the room.

A shrewd, determined look was upon the negro's face. Crossing to the book-keeper's desk, he pulled out the cunningly hidden tube and applied the end to his ear.

The consultation was a lengthy one, but Ducky Dan listened patiently. His dusky face betrayed various emotions, ranging from fear and horror to deadly hatred. Once Simeon Paully rose, opened the door and glanced around the outer office; but the spy, crouching behind the high desk, escaped detection.

The noon hour had passed, when Elephant Eph, fresh from his encounter with Goldspur, entered the stockade gate. His face was swollen and discolored, and he seemed an embodiment of sullen, suppressed fury.

Desiring to avoid a meeting with Con Grayson just then, if possible, the gambler approached the office cautiously, keeping out of line with the door, and peered in at the window.

His heavy jaws closed with a click. Shrinking back, he looked cautiously around. No one was visible inside the stockade, and he hastily prepared to act.

Selecting a heavy stone, he stepped quickly through the doorway and hurled it straight at the crouching spy. The missile sped true, and Ducky Dan, with a single gasp of pain, sank in a senseless heap.

Thus alarmed, Stamm and the book-keeper rushed into the outer office, where Elephant Eph at once explained what had happened.

Stamm at once turned upon Simeon Paully.

"Is that tube some of your work?" he demanded, fiercely.

"Yes, sir. It is."

"By heavens! You sneak, you shall die!"

Quick as a flash, Simeon drew a deringer and covered Stamm.

"Stand back!" he ordered, sharply. "Fool! I am completely master of the situation!"

"You might kill me, yet I should ruin you!"

"A complete record of your transactions, supported by indubitable proof, exists, and will be put forward if I die or disappear!"

Stamm recoiled, and Elephant Eph turned pale.

"Thunder and lightning!" the gambler exclaimed. "Judge, we are a pair of fools! He has got us!"

"Yes, gents, I have got you," continued Simeon, arrogantly. "But I do not intend to push you."

"Now, we'd better get that nigger out of there and coop him. He's beginning to squirm, and in another minute he'll raise an alarm."

Ducky Dan was indeed beginning to show signs of returning consciousness. Before he could regain his feet, however, the three men pounced upon him and dragged him into the rear room, where he was carefully bound and gagged.

Then Stamm threw aside a mat, disclosing a carefully-fitted trapdoor, and the luckless negro was at once consigned to a secret pit beneath the office.

"Grub and water him while I am

gone," Stamm ordered, addressing Simeon. "Find out just what he knows, and see that he has no chance to escape."

The book-keeper nodded, and returned to the outer office, while the manager and Elephant Eph sat down to discuss the latest phases of their villainous compact.

Undetected by them, a bent old figure had emerged from the shadows of the adit, crossed the slope and crouched under the rear window of the office building.

This second spy was none other than Daddy Parker.

CHAPTER XVII. THE LONE BANDIT.

Promptly at three o'clock the Big Nugget stage rolled out of Red Gulch, with Texas Tom, a veteran driver, holding the ribbons.

Devil's Bend, the first station on the run, was a small camp about sixteen miles north of Red Gulch, and the stage was to stop there over night. Big Nugget lay forty-five miles due northeast of Devil's Bend, and it required the full day to make the run between the two camps.

Stamm was in an exultant mood, and chatted pleasantly with his fellow-passengers, not one of whom even suspected the dark and desperate schemes in which the Rainbow manager was so deeply involved.

Just at dark the stage pulled up at the hotel in Devil's Bend, and the passengers alighted and sought accommodations for the night.

It is needless to follow Stamm's movements in detail. Let it answer that he ate heartily, slept soundly, and was up at the first peep of day, ready to continue his journey.

The sun had scarcely cleared the horizon beyond the hills to the eastward when the merry notes of Texas Tom's horn were heard, and the passengers hastily scrambled into the stage. Then his long whip-lash shot out, to crack spitefully above the heads of the leaders, and the creaking vehicle again rolled forward.

The morning was beautiful, the air clear and bracing, and the first five miles of the long trip was in the nature of a delightful pleasure drive.

But the trail presently bent sharply to the eastward, and led up into a range of low hills covered with dwarfed timber, and Texas Tom was compelled to reduce speed to a slow walk.

"Et's ther wust bit o' road on ther hull run," he grumbled, addressing Stamm, who had elected to ride outside that morning. "Up an' down—up an' down, like shore enough teeterin', fer all o' eight miles. I jest nacherly gits ther jerries!"

"Well, the road's safe—there's consolation in that," the manager observed, complacently.

Scarcely had the words passed his lips when Texas Tom uttered a sharp, snarling curse, snapped on the brake and pulled up.

An armed man had leaped from the dense timber into the trail, not fifty feet ahead. A black cloth, with holes cut for eyes and mouth, concealed his head and face, and a Mexican cloak dangled from his shoulders.

"Halt, thar!" he ordered, covering driver and passenger with a brace of heavy "sixes." "This hyar is Cherokee Charlie's layout, an' we don't kalkilate ter hev any foolishness whatsoever."

"Pard pilgrim on ther box, jest on-buckle ther jehu's we'pon belt."

"I reckon, jedge, ye'll shore hev ter do et," Texas Tom observed, vexedly. "We're kivered all right."

"Yes, yes," Stamm assented, and he nervously obeyed the command.

"Now, hol' et up, an' swing down in ther road," the outlaw continued.

Again he was obeyed. Then he compelled Stamm to advance twenty feet, drop it the belt at the roadside, and put down his own weapons beside it.

"Now, ye open ther buss door an' march ev'y blessed pilgrim out, single file an' hands up," pursued the road-agent. "Jest hint, too, thet ther least slip 'at calls fer gun-play'll bring et—shore an' nacherel!"

There was little need of that covert threat, however. The passengers inside the stage had not the slightest idea of resisting, and when Stamm opened the door they at once filed out and stood in a row, with hands up.

"Now, lift ther we'pons, pard pilgrim, an' stack 'em with ther others," the outlaw rang out. "Hurry; too, fer Texas Tom is tired a-waitin'!"

"Thet I is," growled the driver. "Tired waitin' fer Jedge Lynch ter hang ye, Cherokee Charlie!"

The road-agent laughed grimly, and Judge Stamm hastened to follow instructions, carefully stacking the weapons in a heap beside the road. That done, much to their surprise, the passengers were compelled to re-enter the vehicle, while Texas Tom was ordered to drive on to the top of the hill, and there await Judge Stamm.

"Ther rest o' ther crowd isn't worth pluckin', an' so we'll do business with him alone," the outlaw announced, with an ugly flourish of his weapons.

With stern face the Rainbow manager watched the stage roll away, then turned to the outlaw.

"Where is Cherokee?" he demanded, savagely. "The fool! Doesn't he know that this thing is apt to ruin me?"

The road-agent chuckled.

"Hold on! hold on!" he exclaimed, in a bantering tone. "Don't git wrathy, jedge!"

"Ther fact is, you've been deceived! Ye're not in ther hands o' yer friends at all, fer Cherokee's lay-out is in ambush 'bout three miles fu'ther up ther trail!"

Judge Stamm started violently, turned pale, and in a changed voice stammered:

"And who—who are you?"

"I'm the Lone Bandit."

"The Lone Bandit?"

"Yas, sir-ree! I'm a new hoss on this hyar stretch o' road, but I'm in ther harness, an' I kalkilate ter make things fairly hum!" and the fellow chuckled loudly at the conceit.

"But, I reckon we've chinned enough, jedge, so we'll-jest draw off hyar in ther bushes, fer I've some very particular business with *you*."

The Rainbow manager realized that he was helplessly in the toils, and sullenly stepped in the direction indicated.

A very few paces satisfied the outlaw. When just within the shadows of the timber, he halted his captive, and quickly pinioned him to a tree.

"Now, judge," he exclaimed, resolutely facing the helpless rascal; "I reckon ye've got a good deal o' money with ye?"

"Several hundred dollars—yes!"

"And some valuable papers?"

Stamm nodded a reluctant assent.

"Mostly notes?"

"Yes."

"Get 'em out. I want ter see 'em."

"They are personal notes, and will do you no good," demurred Stamm.

"Who made 'em?"

"My ward, Con Grayson."

"So-ho! Gamblin' debts, eh?"

"Yes; but cancelled as such. They are my private property now, and stand as security for moneys I have advanced to pay Grayson's debts."

A peculiar gleam appeared in the eyes of the Lone Bandit.

"Get 'em out!" he insisted, shoving the muzzle of his revolver a few inches nearer Stamm's face. "I must see them."

The Rainbow manager dared not delay longer, and, jerking a bill-book from an inner pocket, he handed it over.

"There!" he exclaimed, petulantly.

"They are in thar."

Accepting the book, the Lone Bandit hastily looked through its contents, then selected a number of papers and handed them to Stamm.

"Aire those ther notes?" he asked.

"They are the notes," was the sullen reply.

"Do ye hold any others ag'in' Grayson?"

"No; they are all here."

"Destroy them!"

Stamm winced, then shook his head obstinately.

"'Twould be madness!" he expostulated. "They represent just so much cash. Be reasonable, man! Take my money and leave me the notes. Their destruction means absolute ruin to me!"

"And their existence means ruin—aye, yes, death!—to Grayson!" was the cold retort. "They were obtained by fraud, do not represent a value received, and so shall be destroyed!"

"Tear them to pieces, bit by bit, and scatter them to the four winds of the heavens, Alex. Stamm, or I'll scatter your brains instead!"

In tones suppressed, yet fairly ringing with full determination, came that stern command, and the muzzle of the Lone Bandit's weapon was pressed sharply against the captive's head.

Judge Stamm quailed, and his portly form shook with terror. Bit by bit his nerveless fingers rent the notes, and the fragments, caught up by the morning breeze, whirled away in the undergrowth.

Not until the last atom had disappeared did the Lone Bandit lower his weapon. Then, with a slash of his knife, he severed the judge's bonds, bowed ceremoniously, and disappeared in the timber!

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE MOTH AND THE CANDLE.

Con Grayson's face wore a flush of eager anticipation as he entered the Rainbow office, just before the closing hour, and glanced quickly around.

Simeon Paully sat in an easy chair, with his feet crossed on the sill of the open window.

"I'll take that package, now, if you please," Con exclaimed, briskly. "Stamm, I believe, spoke to you about it."

"Yes. Get it yourself. It is in the safe there."

Simeon uttered the words without moving or turning his head. There was an insolent ring in his thin voice.

The flush on Con's face deepened to an angry red; but he resolutely checked the harsh words trembling upon his tongue.

"Come, now, Polly!" he expostulated, in a pleasant tone, "don't be crusty. You know I have made it a rule to keep my hands out of the safe, and I do not intend to break that rule now; so get me the package, and I'll be off for home."

Simeon, dropping his feet, wheeled squarely around, his greenish blue eyes glinting with malice.

"By George! you are a persistent beggar!" he retorted, arrogantly. "Understand, though, I am not your servant! If you are goin' to persist in imposin' on Judge Stamm's generosity, you'll have to get the package yourself. I sha'n't help you to it."

"What do you mean, sir?" demanded Con, hotly.

"Just what I said. You are a beggar!"

"That is false!"

"It is true! You've not a dollar of your own to your name!"

"You forget, sir, that one-half of this mine is my property, and that one-half the income stands to my credit on the books. Now, hand me that package, or give up the keys and get out of the office!"

Paully uttered a disagreeable laugh.

"It is you who will leave the office," he retorted, exultantly. "There is practically no income from the mine, as it has barely paid expenses for over two years past. So far as your stock in the Rainbow is concerned, it will revert to Judge Stamm as soon as you are of age, if he pushes the matter. The money advanced by him to pay your gamblin' debts more than covers the value of your interest!"

The flush had faded from Con Grayson's face. The words of the book-keeper fairly staggered him. He knew that they were not without foundation.

"Are you speaking the truth, Simeon Paully?" he demanded, hoarsely. "By heavens, man! I want to know!"

"I am speaking the truth, Con Grayson! You are simply a beggar!"

"And did—did Stamm instruct you to tell me this?"

Simeon chuckled.

"The judge? Oh, no! not he!" he laughed, significantly. "Didn't he leave a thousand in the safe for you? I tell you, Grayson, the judge's desire to win your sister's hand is a lucky thing for you—you poor beggar!"

That taunt was more than Con Grayson could endure. Uttering a wolfish growl, he vaulted lightly over the low railing, and grasped Simeon Paully by the throat.

"Take that, you miserable scoundrel!" he grated, choking the luckless book-keeper until he hung limp and helpless, then dropping him in a heap on the floor. "I will have no more of your insolence!"

Simeon Paully gasped, and sat up. Then he shook his clenched hand at Grayson, and in a voice choking with fierce resentment cried:

"I shall have revenge for this assault, Con Grayson—bitter, black revenge! Mark that!"

The youth made no reply. Laughing grimly, he approached the open safe and secured the package of money, then turned and walked out of the office.

When he had passed beyond the stockade gate, he paused irresolutely. His first impulse was to go home to supper. Then a recollection of his conversation with Agatha that morning came upon him, and he shrugged his shoulders.

"It won't do," he muttered. "I am in no mood to be badgered. I'll go to Sailor Jake's Haven."

To think was to act, just then, and Con Grayson strode hastily in the direction of the hotel.

"The Haven," as it was popularly called, as we have stated, stood just across Black Bear Creek from the Gold-Bar Palace. It was a long, low structure, built stockade-fashion. Of unsavory repute, it was much frequented by the lower element of the camps.

During the forenoon, Elephant Eph had arranged with the proprietor to make it his headquarters, and it happened that he was the first person Con encountered on entering the place.

"Hallo! hallo!" the gambler exclaimed, assuming an expression of pleased surprise. "'Ain't you off your reservation, Grayson?"

Con's face grew dark at sight of the gambler, but he had decided upon a course of action, so curbed his anger and composedly replied:

"Oh, no! I wanted revenge, and was hunting you. After last night's occurrence, I knew you would not return to June's place, so came here."

"You wanted to play, then?"

"Yes, I do! I must have revenge!"

"You remember that I am under a cloud—that I am accused of cheating?"

"There will be no cheating to-night," was the significant reply.

Eph laughed grimly.

"As a matter of fact, there was none last night," he declared. "You will admit the cheating was not proved. Goldspur is an enemy of mine, bent on ruining me."

"I know nothing of that, but am quite sure there will be fair play to-night," returned Con. "Come, get the cards."

Elephant Eph led the way to a table, and a moment later the two men sat down to play.

From the first the stakes were high, and for something more than two hours Con won steadily. Then the tide turned, and luck ran heavily against him.

By ten o'clock his winnings had been

swept away, and of his thousand dollars barely three hundred remained.

The youth's face was white and haggard. His eyes gleamed fitfully, and there was nervousness apparent in every movement.

At last he had realized that he was on the very brink of ruin!

A crowd surrounded the table. In the inner rank stood Trumps and Gold Dick, both fearing trouble, and both keenly alert.

Then came the final game. It fell to Elephant Eph to deal, and he spun out the cards with a practiced hand. Con held three aces and a pair of tens, and refused cards. The gambler drew one.

It at once became evident that both men held extremely good hands. The betting was rapid, until Con's last dollar was in the pot.

"I will raise you one hundred dollars," the youth then exclaimed, in a strained voice.

"Put up the money."

"I am out of cash, but will settle as heretofore."

A peculiar smile crossed Elephant Eph's disfigured face, and he shook his head.

"Put up the cash, or we shall have to show down for the pot," he returned. "I cannot take your note."

"But you have always accepted it!"

"It is no longer good. Stamm tells me you are now a beggar!"

That blunt retort brought the red blood into Con's haggard face, and he rose to his feet.

"Very good!" he exclaimed, crushing back his anger. "I have here three aces and a pair of tens. Now show your hand!"

The gambler at once exposed four kings, exclaiming:

"They win the money!"

A sibilant sound escaped Conrad Grayson's tightly-drawn lips, and with a swift movement he seized Elephant Eph's right wrist. The strength of the youth at that moment seemed superhuman. A faint, crackling sound, as of bones snapping, was heard, and a yell of pain and fury rang through the room.

Then an acc dropped from the gambler's sleeve, and lay exposed upon the table!

A roar of anger went up from the crowd, quickly followed by a ringing cheer, as the youth sent Elephant Eph headlong to the floor.

Grasping the money on the table, Conrad Grayson crammed it into his pockets and strode quickly out into the moonlit night.

CHAPTER XIX.

A DEED OF THE NIGHT.

Leaving Gold Dick to shadow the gambler as arranged by the Dandy Sport, Trumps immediately set forth to watch young Grayson's movements.

That the youth was in a desperate mood could not be doubted, and the miner-detective mentally resolved to use every precaution to escape detection.

Straight to the narrow foot-bridge spanning Black Bear Creek strode Grayson, and without so much as a backward glance crossed and entered the Gold-Bar Palace.

His face was deathly pale, but wore a determined look, and all with whom he came in contact saw at once that he was deeply moved.

Through the hotel office, and into the barroom he passed, his eyes restlessly scanning each face; but the one he sought was not there, and he reluctantly entered the gambling hall, where he was at once cheerily accosted by Johnny June, the Gold-Bar Sport.

A few words passed between the two. Then Con abruptly asked:

"Is Goldspur here to-night?"

"He was, an hour ago. Since then I have not seen him."

"I must find him, for I wronged that man most bitterly last night, June, and am here to tell him so."

The sport had to smile as he replied:

"You did indeed wrong him, Grayson, and most grievously, for Goldspur is a splendid fellow and true as steel; but I fear you will not see him to-night, for I believe he has retired."

Con expressed his regret, turned away and sought a seat in a secluded corner of the room. His brain was in a whirl, and the problems demanding solution were shrouded in disheartening perplexity.

He realized that he was utterly ruined—that he was the victim of an atrocious plot, helped on by his own perversity.

The oft-repeated warnings of Agatha now rang in his ears with frightful force, and he involuntarily pressed a hand to his eyes to shut out from view the sad, white face that seemed to rise before him, gentle and chiding, yet terribly accusing.

"Curse Stamm!" he muttered, in fierce despair. "He has indeed lured me on to ruin, then fled like a coward, leaving his miserable tools to fling the bitter, black truth in my face!"

"But he must return, and then shall come the reckoning, for I shall strip from his face the mask of hypocrisy and let him stand forth as he really is—an infamous scoundrel!"

This thought of vengeance brought a vivid flame to the eyes of the youth—a dash of color to his pallid face. Bending his head upon his hands, he thought long and deeply; then he rose to his feet, muttering:

"Yes, I'll do it! The proof—if proof there is—must be there. And at the worst, it can be no crime."

Fully preoccupied with the project in hand, and little dreaming that he was watched, Con Grayson passed out of the gambling hall, and hastened in the direction of the Rainbow Mine. The moon was shining brightly, but portions of the winding street lay in darkness, and from time to time the youth was lost to view.

But the shadows upon his trail held steadily onward. Fifty yards behind him, skulking along together, were Simeon Paully and Elephant Eph, while at an equal distance behind them came Trumps and Gold Dick! The shadowers were shadowed.

At that hour, the stockade lay in the dense shadow of a mountain spur. Picking his way with care, Con passed slightly beyond the gate, leaped up and grasped the top of the barrier, and the next minute dropped inside the enclosure.

With straining eyes, Simeon Paully and his ally watched this maneuver then glided forward, stealthily unlocked the gate, and entered.

Con had crossed the enclosure, and was opening the office door. A moment later he ignited a match and lighted a lamp.

Then he locked the door, pulled down the window shades, and seated himself in a revolving chair.

"Where to begin—that's the question," he muttered, after a brief scrutiny of his surroundings. "There must be evidence here; but where?"

"In the safe? The books are there, and papers, but they're the doctor's goods. I don't want them, yet. The true books must be found."

He tapped the floor impatiently with his foot.

A muffled sound came from below.

"Good heavens! what was that?" Grayson nervously exclaimed, and he rose from his chair. "It sounded like the groan of one in mortal agony!"

"But, pshaw! I'm nervous. There can be nothing there."

Resuming his seat, he again tapped on the floor.

The groan was repeated.

Con Grayson sat quite still for a moment. He seemed to be listening—listening and thinking profoundly. A peculiar expression came over his face. Taking a revolver from his pocket, he examined it carefully, to assure himself it was

in perfect order, then, weapon in hand, he picked up the lamp and walked into the rear office, where he paused and glanced around.

His gaze fell upon the mat. This he at once dragged aside and knelt down. The trap-door was revealed. He raised it, disclosing a short, steep flight of steps.

"By heavens! this is a lucky find!" Con exclaimed, exultingly. "Things point more and more to the fact that Stamm is a thoroughbred in villainy."

Again taking up the lamp, the youth boldly descended into the secret cellar. It proved a mere caddy, about six feet in depth, seven feet long and four feet wide.

In one corner lay Darky Dan, bound and gagged!

"Aha!" Con ejaculated. "My ears did not deceive me! So, Darky Dan, you are a captive?"

The negro grunted and nodded his head violently. His bloodshot eyes blazed with hope.

In another minute his bonds parted under the keen edge of a knife, and the gag was stripped from his stiffened jaws.

"There, stretch yourself, man, and we'll get out of here," Con exclaimed, with a shudder. "It is a horrible place."

Darky Dan stretched his long arms, and danced clumsily around on his stiffened legs. A look of fear was upon his face, and he worked his jaws spasmodically in an attempt to speak.

Con had turned, and was curiously surveying the walls of the cellar. They were of stone, and evidently had been erected by a skilled mason.

The one glance satisfied the youth, for the time; but he resolved to make a thorough search of the secret cellar before the night was ended.

"Come, Dan; we'll go up into the office," he called out, witnessing the peculiar gyrations of the negro. "I am anxious to hear your story."

Lamp in hand, he hastened up the steps.

A look of wild terror swept over Darky Dan's face. He tottered blindly, and attempted to grasp the youth's heels. His massive chest rose and fell convulsively, and a hoarse shout of alarm rose from his parched throat and tongue.

That warning cry came too late! Con had reached the top step. The butt of a heavy revolver fell upon his head with crushing force, and, with a low cry, he fell backward into the cellar.

The lamp, slipping from his nerveless fingers, struck the office floor with a crash, and burst into numberless fragments. The oil ignited, and in less than a minute the room was a vivid glare of light!

"Quick! down with the door, man, and throw the bolt!" cried a hoarse voice. "We must get away before the camp is aroused!"

The trap-door dropped with a resounding clang, and the bolt in a secret lock clicked sharply. Dripping with perspiration and fairly quivering with conscious guilt, Simeon Pauly and Elephant Eph then hurriedly quitted the burning building and fled through the darkness.

When morning came, Red Gulch was in a fever of excitement.

Just at sunrise the denizens of the camp had been called together by the mayor, and informed that both Agatha and Conrad Grayson were missing.

It was explained, by Daddy Parker, that Agatha had gone, the preceding day, on a business trip to the Hermit Miners' claim, under escort of Moses Lumper, and had failed to return.

Of the movements of Conrad Grayson, from the moment he quitted the Gold-Bar Palace the night before, nothing was known.

Many believed that the youth would turn up during the day; others, suspecting that his disappearance bore some mysterious connection with the burning

of the office of the Rainbow Mine, silently shook their heads and reserved their opinions.

The absence of Agatha, however, puzzled all, and it was generally believed that she had fallen into the hands of outlaws.

Quickly selecting a half-dozen trustworthy men, Jubal Strong announced that he would make a thorough search for the missing girl, and promptly at nine o'clock the party assembled, well armed and well mounted.

The mayor, white and haggard, but stern and implacable, placed himself in the lead, and the search was begun.

CHAPTER XX.

A STARTLING SURPRISE.

"I am a prisoner!—I am held for ransom!"

"This mock courtesy but thinly veils the outlaw's purpose, and I must escape, or pay heavily for freedom!"

Thus thought Agatha Grayson while sitting in the dimly-lighted cavern, awaiting the appearance of Cherokee Charlie's wife. The pretense that she had been brought there to meet her attorney, Orrville Dubois, had not for a single minute deceived her.

Her chin rested in her hand, and one foot beat the floor impatiently.

"Yes, yes! and I feel that this is some of Judge Stamm's doings, too!" she continued, with a quick flash of her black eyes. "Indeed, it occurs to me now that I may be the victim of a carefully arranged plot in which the Hermit Miners' claim figured as the decoy!"

"Merciful powers! how foolish it was to ignore Aunt Parker's advice! I should have taken Con into my confidence, and prevailed upon him to secure me a suitable escort."

"But, it is too late, now, and I must not lament, but bend every energy toward escape!"

"That is true, Miss Grayson—perfectly true, and I will aid you in your plans," uttered a soft voice directly behind the captive, and a middle-aged woman, with sad and patient face and a careworn air, stepped into view.

"Nay, do not start! Unconsciously, you were speaking aloud, and I heard the words, but will not betray you."

Agatha rose to her feet. Her black eyes fixed themselves upon the woman's face.

"I believe you speak truly," she exclaimed, impulsively, after a moment. "Indeed, you look a picture of goodness, Mrs.—Mrs.—"

"Middleton," the outlaw's wife supplied, smiling sadly. "That is my husband's name."

"During your stay here, Miss Grayson, you will be under my care and occupy my private quarters until we can find a chance for you to escape, or you are ransomed."

Agatha bowed, then, abruptly changing the subject, asked:

"And Mr. Dubois, Mrs. Middleton—when am I to see him?"

"At once, if you wish."

Agatha expressed a desire for an immediate meeting, whereupon the outlaw's wife led the way into an adjoining corridor, and thence to a distant alcove of the cavern.

A rift in the roughly-shelving roof admitted a dim, grayish light. Agatha's eyes had become accustomed to the gloom, and she at once discerned the outlines of a man chained to the wall.

"He is there," Mrs. Middleton announced, with a wave of her thin hand. "I will await you here."

The maiden quickly moved forward, and in another minute confronted that crouching shape.

"Mr. Dubois—Orrville!" she exclaimed.

Springing up, the captive advanced the length of his chain.

"Good heavens! can it be possible!" he ejaculated, in a voice quivering with strong emotion. "You—Agatha Grayson!"

"Yes, Orrville, it is I, and like yourself a captive."

Dubois uttered a groan, then grasped the maiden's hand and carried it to his lips.

"I little dreamed we would meet thus when I wrote you I was coming," he exclaimed, in tremulous tones. "Our enemies have not been asleep!"

"No; but we must yet baffle them."

"I fear we are helpless!"

Agatha gazed keenly at the captive. His face was that of a man of middle age, and handsome, though so delicately chiseled as to betray effeminacy. The eyes were large, blue and lustrous, the hair and beard brown and wavy.

It was evident to the maiden that Orrville Dubois was sadly shaken by his brief captivity.

"We must have courage," she cheerily rejoined, after that brief scrutiny. "We must escape."

"I believe that will be impossible. These scoundrels want money, and we shall have to pay ransom. Indeed, I have prepared the way for negotiations."

"You surprise me!"

"Yes? Well, I acted promptly. The chief hinted at money, and I sent a message to Red Gulch late last night, explaining my predicament, and enlisting the good offices of John June."

Agatha uttered a gasp of astonishment.

"Why to him?" she exclaimed. "He is a miserable gambler, and for aught you know leagued with the outlaws."

"Oh, no! he's not that, though he is a gambler," Dubois protested. "He is an honorable man in a dishonorable business, I should say. He is true as steel, and my sworn friend. Sending to him was my only recourse."

Moreover, he was partially familiar with my business in Red Gulch. I wrote you some time ago that I would have a man in the camp to look after Con's interests. June was the man."

Agatha reflected a moment, then hastily sketched the details of the Gold-Bar Sport's visit to her that morning.

"You confirm my estimate of the man," he declared. "Stamm would have been willing to pay him at least face value for the notes, if I understand the case clearly."

"Then, too, June has wonderful influence with the United States Marshal for this territory, and has succeeded in enlisting his services in the case."

Agatha was about to speak when a wild yell of terror rang through the cavern.

Dubois started and trembled violently, while the maiden turned pale.

"I fear that was Moses Lumper!" she exclaimed. "Can they be murdering him?"

"They are capable of doing anything," averred Dubois, with a shiver.

Hurried steps were heard, followed by a confused sound of voices. Then all grew silent.

Agatha again turned to the captive lawyer, and for nearly a half-hour they conferred in low tones.

"Remember, we must keep up courage—we must escape!" the maiden enjoined, as the interview ended, and she quickly retraced her steps to Mrs. Middleton.

Dubois sank back against the wall, and hopelessly watched Agatha's receding form until it disappeared in the gloom.

"Heaven grant us liberty!" he muttered.

Meanwhile, the outlaw's wife was leading the maiden rapidly through the damp corridor. On gaining the main cavern, she turned abruptly to the right, crossed a large open space, and ascended a movable flight of wide steps built against the wall.

Pausing on the top step, the woman pulled sharply on a cord dangling from a crevice above, and pushed the wall, a portion of which at once swung back on hinges, disclosing a long and narrow natural passage!

"Come, we are nearly there," she ex-

claimed, leading Agatha into the gloomy fissure and closing the door. "Place your hands upon my shoulders and follow, step by step."

The captive obeyed. At the end of the passage, a second door was opened, and the two stepped out into a beautiful, rock-girt glen, several acres in extent.

Agatha paused and uttered a cry of surprise.

"This is my home," Mrs. Middleton announced. "It is here you will have to remain until you are ransomed or escape."

"It is a beautiful place, but I pray that my departure may not be long delayed," returned the captive.

The outlaw's wife vouchsafed no response to that earnest wish, but led the way toward a tiny cabin nestling in the shade of a clump of dwarfed pines, and in another minute Agatha was fairly within her prison.

The cabin, small as it seemed, contained two rooms, and both were comfortably furnished. A hammock swung in the porch, and rustic seats were scattered among the pines.

"Make yourself as comfortable as possible," urged the outlaw's wife, in a sympathetic voice. "You are fully as safe here as beneath your own roof." Then she added, in a low voice:

"To-night, we shall try to escape."

Agatha's face lighted up hopefully.

"Will not that be the means of getting you into trouble?" she asked, anxiously.

Mrs. Middleton uttered a mirthless laugh, and, gazing at the girl earnestly, she sighed deeply.

At that juncture a step announced the approach of some one, and, a moment later, the outlaw chief entered the cabin.

As he did so he lifted his sombrero and bowed ceremoniously, when a sharp puff of wind caught his mask and whirled it aside.

The maiden shrank back and uttered a faint cry of terror.

The face thus revealed was that of Jubal Strong, the mayor of Red Gulch!

CHAPTER XXI.

THE ESCAPE.

An angry execration escaped the outlaw, as he hastily replaced the mask.

"Further attempt at concealment of your identity is useless, Jubal Strong!" she exclaimed, coldly. "I demand my immediate release from this robbers' den!"

"You may keep on demanding, my dear young lady," was the cool retort. "But, understand just this: you don't budge a foot from this rendezvous until you have crossed my palm with gold!"

"What amount do you demand?"

"Five thousand dollars."

"Return me to Red Gulch at once, and I will pay it."

"I cannot do that."

"Why not?"

"You forget that I am an outlaw!"

"Sir, my knowledge of that fact now is indelible," and Agatha's lip curled scornfully.

"You would betray me to Stamm," insisted the chief.

"I agree to betray you to no one, and to give you twenty-four hours in which to escape from the camp."

"That sounds fair enough," he admitted; "but, how about Dubois? Will you leave him here?"

"No; he must accompany me."

"That will cost you five thousand dollars more."

"I will pay it."

"Umph! You are richer than I thought, Agatha Grayson!" and the chief's eyes sparkled covetously.

"Meeting your demands will leave me almost penniless, Jubal Strong," was the bitter retort.

"Don't call me 'Jubal Strong.' That is not my name!"

"It is the name you are known by in Red Gulch."

"Again you are mistaken. I am not

known in the camp, and please remember, also, that my name is Charles Middleton."

Agatha lifted her hand in disgust.

"A truce to this talk! It is idle," she exclaimed.

"Do you agree to release Mr. Dubois and myself upon payment of the amounts named?"

"Yes; provided I receive the money before either of you leaves this rendezvous."

"I cannot pay it here."

"You can send a messenger to camp for the money."

"Not yet. I decline to take that step, at present."

"Very well. Make up your mind within twenty-four hours. I am going now, and will be absent that long, at least."

Mrs. Middleton then drew her husband aside, and for some minutes the two carried on an earnest conversation. Their voices were too low for Agatha to hear what was said, had she so wished; but she could not help noticing that the woman was pleading, the man angry.

At length the outlaw gave his parting orders to his wife, turned and strode away.

Entering the cabin, Mrs. Middleton sat down near the door. Her eyes were dim with unshed tears.

"Miss Grayson," she exclaimed abruptly, "you addressed my husband, just now, as 'Jubal Strong.' Will you kindly tell me what that meant?"

Agatha explained.

"And I am quite sure that I was not mistaken," she declared, in conclusion. "He is Jubal Strong, and no one else."

"I am afraid you are right," Mrs. Middleton nervously admitted. "My husband is nearly always absent, and has expressly forbidden my visiting Red Gulch. These two facts certainly go to support your surmise."

"It was not surmise, but absolute recognition," asserted Agatha, quickly. "Forgive me if I wound you, Mrs. Middleton. I am right, or Jubal Strong has a most dangerous double."

The captive and her keeper talked earnestly for some time, and a perfect understanding was at length established.

Then food was prepared and eaten, the cabin securely locked, and both lay down to seek rest and strength for the nocturnal flight.

Just at sunset they arose, and by nightfall the preparations were completed. Leaving Agatha in the cabin, the outlaw's wife seized a bunch of keys and hastened down into the cavern.

Her return was not long delayed.

"I succeeded in releasing Dubois, and got him safely outside the rendezvous," she announced, breathlessly.

"And Lumper?"

"I searched the cavern thoroughly, but he was not to be found."

Agatha turned pale.

"Can they have killed him?" she asked, nervously.

"Oh, no!" Mrs. Middleton declared. "Bad as he is, my husband would not tolerate an affair of that kind. Lumper has succeeded in escaping, or been removed to—to—"

"Where?" inquired Agatha, falling, in the darkness, to notice the woman's confusion.

Mrs. Middleton hesitated a moment.

"If you will agree not to use the information against my husband, I will tell you," she replied, slowly.

"I cannot promise," was the frank response.

"Then I cannot tell you."

"Now, if you are ready to go, follow me."

The outlaw's wife moved rapidly through the darkness of the glen, with the captive following closely. Entering the cavern, they kept in the shadows of the wall until they had gained the exit, then hurriedly crossed a narrow moonlight space and plunged into a thicket.

"I left Mr. Dubois here," Mrs. Middleton explained, peering around. "He was to await our coming."

The lawyer was nowhere visible, and a thorough search of the thicket failed to discover him.

"He may have been recaptured," Agatha suggested despondently.

The woman shook her head.

"I do not think so," she declared. "But you remain here while I return to the cavern and see. Do not leave this thicket under any circumstances."

The maiden assented, and the outlaw's wife glided silently away.

Nearly an hour had elapsed when she reappeared, and Agatha plainly read disappointment in her expressive face.

"He is not there?" she exclaimed, breathlessly.

"No; he has not been retaken," was the reply. "He has probably become alarmed and hurried onward."

"But come—let us be moving. I have been unable to secure horses, and the walk is a long one."

Agatha needed no urging. Her interview with Dubois in the cavern came back most vividly, and she felt that the explanation of his absence was at least plausible.

Her lips curled and her eyes flashed scornfully, while through her brain ran the thought:

"Good heavens! Who could have dreamed him such a coward?"

Meanwhile, the fugitives were hastening down a sharp slope, with Mrs. Middleton in the lead. When they had gained the valley, she clasped Agatha's hand and urged her into a faster pace.

"We must get as far away as possible before daybreak," she declared, nervously looking back. "Our absence will not likely be discovered before my husband's return, but he will move heaven and earth to retake us."

"Somewhere ahead there is a wagon trail which I have heard spoken of as leading into Red Gulch, and we must reach that before we even stop to rest."

For hours they hurried onward, until, footsore and weary, just at daybreak, they came upon the trail. As she glanced around, Agatha uttered a cry of amazement.

"It was right here we were captured!" she exclaimed.

Mrs. Middleton shuddered.

"We must rest, but not here," she declared. "Let us get on, and away from the trail."

Agatha assented, and they trudged onward for nearly a mile, then turned aside and plunged into the thick undergrowth bordering a small stream.

Seeking a secluded nook, both sat down and ate heartily of the food the outlaw's wife had thoughtfully provided.

Then, worn out by their long and tedious tramp, both fell asleep. The sun was high in the heavens when they awoke. Refreshing themselves at the stream, they hurried back to the trail.

Just before they emerged from the undergrowth, a heavy trampling on the trail warned them of the approach of a party of horsemen, and they hastily shrank into a leafy covert.

The next minute the riders swept by, going toward Cherokee Charlie's stronghold.

Agatha uttered a faint cry of terror.

"It was Jubal Strong and his men!" she gasped.

CHAPTER XXII.

FROM FRIEND TO ENEMY.

Mrs. Middleton turned deathly pale, tottered, and would have fallen but for Agatha's supporting arm.

"Courage!" whispered the maiden. "They are gone now, and we can resume our flight."

"Thank heaven!" uttered the terrified woman. "The escape was a narrow one, and completely unnerved me."

Agatha had now fully recovered her composure, and hastened to reassure Mrs. Middleton. So well directed were her efforts that the woman quickly ral-

lied, and the flight was resumed within a few minutes.

No further adventure awaited them. Shortly after twelve o'clock they came in sight of Red Gulch. Both were travel-stained and dusty; and, true to her feminine instincts, Agatha avoided the street and approached the Grayson homestead by a private path leading thereto from the rear.

Old Margie, the colored servant, met them at the kitchen door, and threw up her hands with a yell of delight.

"Bress de Lawd! Missy 'Gatha—chile! Come right in y'ar!" She wheezed, fairly quivering with excitement and joy. "We's dun made suah de robbahs had gobbled yo' up, an' yo' poah ole Aunt Parker—she's jes' crazy wif grief, so she am! Come right in y'ar!"

"Coming, Margie, coming!" laughed Agatha, gayly, as she clasped the hand of the outlaw's wife and drew her to the house.

Mrs. Parker, summoned by the unusual commotion, at that moment opened a door and entered the kitchen. She was a feeble, white-haired woman of sixty years. At sight of Agatha, an expression of joyous relief beamed from her careworn face, and she clasped the girl in her arms.

"We feared some misadventure had befallen you," she declared, in trembling tones.

"A misadventure did befall me," Agatha averred. "I was captured yesterday by outlaws, and but for this good lady, Mrs. Middleton, I should yet be in their power."

"Middleton, did you say?" and Mrs. Parker turned quickly to the outlaw's wife.

The eyes of the two women met, and each regarded the face of the other curiously for a moment, while both betrayed unwonted agitation. Then the elder threw wide her arms, exclaiming:

"Helen! Helen! My child! my child!"

"Mother! mother!"

Agatha gazed at the scene in wide-eyed astonishment.

"Well, I declare!" she ejaculated. "I don't understand this!"

"It means that you have found my daughter," Mrs. Parker beamingly returned.

"And brought me to my mother," explained Mrs. Middleton, joyously.

"Then we are cousins!"

"Exactly!"

Agatha warmly greeted her new-found relative, and they adjourned to the sitting-room for further explanations.

Without following the unfortunate woman's story in detail, it may be briefly stated that Helen Parker had become the wife of Charles Middleton, in Connecticut, nearly fifteen years prior to the date of this romance. Shortly thereafter, Middleton emigrated to Minnesota, where he secured a promising position in a St. Paul mercantile house. Five years later, the house failed, and Middleton was arrested on the charge of forgery, tried and convicted, and sent up for a long term in the penitentiary.

But he was an innocent man, the victim of a machination of one Nicodemus Judd, a junior partner in the house. Judd was a lawyer, and very cunning and unscrupulous, but was eventually detected in one of his desperate schemes and forced to flee the country.

After a year's confinement, Middleton escaped, and fled into the wilds of Montana, where he was joined by his faithful wife. Under an assumed name, he worked in the mines, but was finally ferreted out and forced to flee to avoid recapture. For years he continued as a fugitive, hounded from State to State, until at last, in sheer despair, he accepted the fate seemingly forced upon him, and boldly took to the road.

No hint of Middleton's misfortunes had ever reached the Parkers. In her despair, Helen had at first failed to write home, and afterward refrained from doing so because of the dangers to which

she feared, such a correspondence might subject her husband.

So the Parkers had long mourned their daughter as dead, and great indeed was the mother's joy at again beholding her alive and in the flesh.

When these explanations were ended, Mrs. Parker informed Agatha of the burning of the Rainbow office, and of Con's mysterious absence.

At first, the girl was puzzled; then she became alarmed.

"There is something back of this," she declared, with emphasis. "The matter must be investigated at once."

"Your uncle is down in the camp, and has doubtless taken the steps necessary," Mrs. Parker suggested. "In any event, I would advise you to await his return."

Then she rose and led her daughter away, and Agatha was alone.

The girl was in a quandary. She felt that something serious had befallen Con, yet knew not what to do. Deliberation assured her that the course suggested by her aunt was the best thing possible, just then, and she decided to await Daddy Parker's return.

In the interim, she could put herself in presentable shape, and be ready to return to the camp with him, should that be necessary.

So deciding, Agatha retired to her room.

Hardly a half hour had passed when Daddy Parker appeared. He was accompanied by Orrville Dubois. Both men seemed to be greatly excited.

"Sir, you will sit down—you will rest yourself," the old man exclaimed, in his peculiar way, as they entered the parlor. "I will call Mrs. Parker, and we'll hold a family council, sir—yes, sir—a family council!"

Dubois sank wearily into a chair. He looked wan and haggard. His costly clothing was covered with dust and hung in tatters.

The old man moved briskly out of the room. At the same moment, a door opened and Agatha entered.

The lawyer sprang to his feet, electrified with astonishment.

"My dear Miss Grayson! Is it possible?" he ejaculated.

"You confront, not a possibility, Mr. Dubois, but an actuality," was the cool response.

"May I ask how you escaped from the outlaws?"

"Certainly, Agatha—certainly," Dubois stammered, growing red under the keen gaze of the girl. "Money did it. I bribed a member of the band."

"Aha! That was a cunning trick."

"Yes; but in this world we must meet cunning with cunning, you know."

"As I said, I bought my way out, and as soon as I was clear of the den, I hastened toward Red Gulch, determined to raise a party and effect your rescue."

"How thoughtful of you!"

Orrville Dubois smiled complacently. Then a fresh thought occurred to him. His brow clouded and he asked:

"But how is it that you are here?"

Agatha's face grew grave.

"I owe my freedom to the same kind hand that unlocked your chains, Orrville Dubois," she replied. "You were to await me, but fled like a coward!"

"Miss Grayson—"

"Silence, sir! That act killed my respect for you. Now you come to me with a falsehood upon your lips, to screen your cowardice, and also defame the one who befriended you. Sir, I detest you!"

Dubois's big blue eyes flashed madly.

"I object!" he exclaimed. "What right have you—"

"I have the right to dismiss you from the case that calls you to Red Gulch, and I now do so," Agatha interrupted, sternly. "In plain language, you are not to be trusted!"

The lawyer recoiled.

"And the—the other—" he stammered, breaking off in utter confusion.

"Need you ask? That, too, ends here and now!"

A groan burst from Dubois's lips.

Then he resolutely curbed his feelings, and turned to the girl.

His effeminate face wore an expression of fiendish malignity.

"Very well, Agatha Grayson!" he enunciated, coldly. "I have only this to say: You are no longer to consider me as a friend, but as an implacable enemy!"

Then he caught up his hat and stalked angrily out of the house, closing the door with a bang.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A BRAND FROM THE BURNING.

Return we now to the Lone Bandit, the audacious knight of the road, whom we have seen discomfit Judge Stamm.

Without so much as a backward glance at his pallid victim, he glided rapidly through the undergrowth until he had reached a secluded dell about two hundred yards off the trail.

There, a clean-limbed roan horse was tethered, and the bandit quickly unhitched the animal, mounted, and rode away, laying his course toward Devil's Bend.

For something more than a mile he kept back in the timber, then removed and destroyed his mask, and boldly spurred out into the trail.

When within a half-mile of the camp, however, he again sought cover, and made a wide detour, coming out upon the trail nearly two miles below.

"There! I reckon that will do," he muttered, riding into a sheltered nook beside a swiftly flowing stream. "I am hungry, and must feast."

Dismounting, he watered the horse, then sat down on a flat-topped boulder, and opened a haversack of food.

"Why should I not die?"

"Fortune has indeed deserted me! I am hungry and penniless—I have not a friend in the world!"

"Life has become a burden, existence a mockery. Death is oblivion, they say, and in the grave there is peace."

"Yes, yes! I will do it! A single shot, a single spasm of pain, and all will be ended!"

These words, uttered in a voice of hopeless melancholy, came from a tall young man seated beneath a spreading oak, close beside the stream. His eyes, hair, and mustaches were dark, his features strong and resolute, though white and pinched. His clothing, once of fine texture, and fashionable cut, hung in shreds and tatters.

He held a revolver in his hand; and as he finished speaking he started to raise the muzzle to his head.

But at that instant a shot rang out, the weapon whirled out of his grasp, and a dozen stinging spatters of lead drew the blood from his hand.

"Har-har! That was a putty blame good joke! Ye jumped just like ye was shot! Har-har!" and the Lone Bandit emerged from behind a screen of bushes, carrying a smoking revolver. "Blamed ef ye ain't about ther biggest fool I've seen around these hyar parts yit!"

"Who aire ye, anyhow, an' what ye mean monkeyin' with thet thar gun?"

The young man drew himself up with a gesture of scorn and coldly replied:

"My name, sir, is Justus Jarrett, and I was on the point of ending my miserable life."

"Har-har! Wal, I'll declar! An' I spoiled yer fun, eh? It's too bad—too bad!"

Jarrett flushed angrily.

"Don't make a jest of my misery," he protested. "You know nothing of my trouble."

"Trouble! Justus, you jest wait till ye're old es yours truly, an' then talk o' trouble! I'm ther on'y an' 'riginal Hercules Redrock, ther prize beauty f'm Brimstone Butte, an' I kalkilate ter know more about most troubles than ther man who started 'em. I do! Har-har!"

"An' now, Justus, jest open up yer heart, an' tell me what's workin' on ye."

"I am starving!"

"Sho! Is that all?"

"I am penniless!"

"Look hyar, Justus! I heer'd them things when ye was spoutin' to yerself a bit ago, an' they shore don't go fer much."

"Man's got no cause ter let daylight through his head fer sech es that, when a bit o' rustlin' 'u'd fill both stomach an' purse. You come with me."

Redrock seized Jarrett by the arm and literally forced him through the screen of bushes. Then he pointed to the haversack of food lying on the bowlder.

"Thar ye aire! You feed!" he ordered.

Justus Jarrett required no second bidding. With a pleased cry, he fell upon the haversack and ate ravenously of its contents.

When he had finished he uttered a sigh of relief, and warmly grasped Redrock's hand and thanked him.

"That's all right," asserted he of the red beard, good-naturedly. "You see, ye're a-feelin' a heap better already! Now, jest squat thar on ther rock. I want ter talk ter you a bit."

"Ye're a tenderfoot, I presume?"

"Yes, sir."

"Got ary incumbrance?"

"Family? No, sir."

"Would you take a job down in Red Gulch?"

"Yes, I'd go anywhere, sir."

Redrock stroked his beard thoughtfully, and after a moment continued:

"I'm on my way thar myself. I've got a friend thar, named Goldspur. He needs a bright, well-educated man, sech es I take you ter be, an' ef ye care ter try fer ther job I'll say a word fer you."

Jarrett rose from the rock.

"Thank you!" he exclaimed, eagerly. "I wish you would do so. I'll go at once."

"What business is your friend in?"

"You've got me thar," and Redrock shook his head. "I kalkilate he's one o' these hyar minin' stock sharps. Any way, he's honest, an' wants a man, so you go to ther Gold-Bar Palace, an' ask fer Gilbert Goldspur."

"I'll meet ye thar myself, ter-night, an' see that ye hev a fa'r show. An', by ther way, ye better tuck this hyar ten in yer vest pocket, fer ye'll nacherel feel like sprucin' up a bit when ye strike ther camp, seein' es ye're a stranger thar."

A painful flush came over Jarrett's face, and he drew back from the bank-note Redrock tendered him.

"I can't accept that," he declared.

"Yes, ye kin!" stoutly. "Ye're goin' ter Red Gulch, ain't ye?"

"Yes."

"Ye'll hev ter walk et?"

"Oh, yes."

"Wal, now, look hyar. This ten's yer guarantee. Ef ye git ther job, ye pay et back ter me, by an' by; ef ye don't, ye're paid fer yer time an' trouble, any way. See?"

Jarrett was still inclined to demur, but Redrock laughingly caught him by the shoulder and thrust the bill into his vest pocket.

The next minute the eccentric sport had mounted his horse and was speeding away.

"That's a determined galoot," he muttered, glancing back at the figure beside the bowlder. "If I hadn't interfered, he'd have let daylight through his head as sure as fate."

"Well, if I'm any judge of character, he's just the man I want, and so I may call the time well spent."

Meanwhile, Justus Jarrett was gazing after his rescuer in silent wonder.

"What a strange character!" he thought. "That man is a mystery, yet seems to work for the good. He certainly read my despair aright, and stayed my hand in time."

"Yes, I owe my life to him—I will do as he has ordered."

Leaving his damaged revolver where it had fallen, Jarrett hastened out to the trail, and cheerily began his long tramp to Red Gulch.

A flush of hope had taken the place of that deathly pallor; his dark eyes sparkled brightly, and he seemed imbued with new life and hope.

It was late in the afternoon when he neared Red Gulch. A half-mile above the camp he stopped for a bath in Black Bear Creek, then hastened on and just at sunset entered the Gold-Bar Palace.

Here he was greeted effusively by Hercules Redrock, who led him to a table in a retired corner of the room.

"Now, you sot down thar," the red-bearded sport requested. "I'll run upstairs an' send Goldspur down."

Before Jarrett could remonstrate, Redrock vanished.

Ten minutes later, Goldspur, fresh and smiling, descended the stairs, entered the barroom, and approached the table.

"You are Justus Jarrett, I presume?" he asked.

"I am, sir; and you, I believe, are Mr. Gilbert Goldspur?"

"Yes. My friend Redrock tells me you are seeking employment, and I am here to see if I can engage you."

"There will be little trouble about that," Jarrett assured, with a smile.

Then the two men shook hands and sat down, and at once began a low-voiced conversation.

For upward of a half-hour they talked, then Goldspur drew a roll of bills from his pocket and counted off sixty dollars, which he handed to Jarrett, saying:

"Here is a month's pay in advance."

"Now, remain about the Gold-Bar Palace to-night, for I suspect that I shall need you."

CHAPTER XXIV.

DICK DODDS AGAIN.

Early in the night, Gold Dick, the miner-detective, sought out the Dandy Sport, and, using the code agreed upon, signaled that he wished to meet him privately.

A few minutes later, the two men came together on the narrow footbridge spanning Black Bear Creek.

"Pard Goldspur, I hes news fer ye," Gold Dick announced.

"I was sure you would have, Dick," was the reply. "I have been out of camp since last night, but am informed that much of interest has been going on."

"You refer, I suppose, to the burning of the office of the Rainbow mine?"

"Yes, pard, ter thet, an' a heap more. Ye see, Trumps an' me hes bin busy, an' we hes turned up a pile o' evidence."

"Last night we shaddeder young Grayson an' Elephant Eph. They met in Sailor Jake's Haven, an' played another game. Eph was caught cheatin', an' thar was trouble, though no one was much hurted."

"Then Grayson left an' hunted fer you, but failed to find yer, an' finally started fer ther Rainbow office."

"In ther meantime, Elephant Eph hed sneaked out ther back way f'm ther Haven, an' met Sim Paully, ther bookkeeper. Ther two confabulated a bit, then sneaked off an' struck Grayson's trail, which same they follered right ter ther Rainbow office."

"But Trumps an' me war on deck, you bet, an' we jest lingered behind till they'd got through ther gate, then skipped up an' climbed ther stockade fer ter see what was goin' on inside."

"Thar was a light in ther office, an' Eph and Sim was hangin' 'round outside. Then ther light seemed ter go out, so we crept up close, an' saw Sim unlock the door an' both slip inside."

"We know'd then thar was goin' ter be trouble fer shore, fer young Grayson was in thar an' them two hounds meant mischief—no less! So we moved up close ter jine in, when thar came a tremendjus racket f'm inside, follered by an awful yell, an' then ther light blazed up big in ther back room."

"Before we c'u'd move, ther front door was jerked open, an' Eph an' Sim tumbled out an' ran fer ther gate. Thet was ther chainece Trumps an' me wanted, so we slipped in an' shet ther door."

"Grayson wasn't thar. Ther back room was on fire, an' we was shore puzzled, when some one pounded on ther floor f'm below an' yelled fer help!"

"Then we see'd thar was a trap in ther floor, an' we bu'sted et open, when out of the cellar popped Ducky Dan!"

"Ducky Dan, eh?" exclaimed Goldspur, deeply interested in that hurried recital.

"Yas, our black pard, an' he was scart hafe ter death, too. But he rallied quick when he saw who we war, an' told us Grayson war below, dead. It was gettin' most owdashus hot, but we got ther lad out, an' then ther three of us carried him away f'm ther stockade, an' we hid him an' Ducky Dan away in a deserted dug-out up ther slope."

"Then we found out Grayson wasn't dead, though bad hurted f'm a bang over ther head, an' we fixed him up an' laid quiet till we c'u'd see you."

"You have done well, Gold Dick," the Dandy Sport gravely declared.

"But if Grayson is hurt he must have surgical attention at once, so I will send the doctor up with you."

"Hold on, Pard Goldspur! Trumps is a sawbones f'm A to Izzard. He's got Grayson on ther mend, an' ef et's ter be a secret—"

"You are right, Gold Dick—it means one less tongue to still; but if Grayson seems dangerously hurt, or grows worse, send for the doctor at once."

"In the mean time, have Trumps remain at the cabin with him, and order Ducky Dan to keep under cover. I will see him before the night is done, for I am puzzled to account for his presence there in the cellar."

Gold Dick chuckled.

"He got too bold, an' war caught listenin' in the Rainbow office," he explained. "They knocked him senseless, an' put him away."

"That was it, eh? Well, return to the cabin and tell Trumps and Ducky Dan just what is to be done. Impress upon them, too, the value of absolute secrecy."

"I'll do et, pard."

"Then take a look at Elephant Eph, and return to the Gold-Bar Palace. I have been planning an important move, and it may be that I shall execute it to-night."

"I've got that down, Pard Goldspur."

"Very good. There's just one other point, and then we'll separate before we attract attention."

"Hereafter, when you fail to find me, report to Hercules Redrock, the stranger in camp. If he gives orders, obey them just as you would if they came direct from me."

Gold Dick seemed surprised, but made no comment, and a moment later the men parted.

The Dandy Sport turned his steps in the direction of the calaboose.

"The night is young, and I may as well see Dick Dodds," he mused. "Something tells me the man will finally weaken and confess, and that I shall learn who my unknown enemy is."

Shocky Pete, the jailor, greeted the Sport pleasantly, and readily granted his request for an interview with the prisoner.

"Et was Raymond's orders that you should see him ef ye called," he explained, graciously. "But thar hev bin others hyar that I tarded away."

"His friends have not deserted him, then?"

"Oh, no! Jubal Strong hes bin hyar twice an' he even offered money fer a chainece ter see Dodds."

"Then Sim Paully, ther Rainbow bookkeeper, was hyar late in ther afternoon, an' he wanted ter talk with Dodds."

"He seems to be popular," Goldspur remarked.

The jailor winked mysteriously. Then he opened the cell-room door and permitted the Sport to enter.

The ex-deputy was sitting on the edge of a table in an attitude of dejection. He looked up quickly as Goldspur stepped into the room.

"You here!" he exclaimed, bitterly.
 "Yes, Dick Dodds, and you should be glad to see me, for I come to give you a chance to clear your skirts," was the cool response.

"I cannot do it!"

"Think well, my man!"

The prisoner doggedly shook his head.

"I cannot do it," he repeated.

"Dare not, you mean!"

"I didn't say that."

"You were hired to get me out of the way?"

"No, sir; I was not."

"Then you were coerced!" declared Goldspur, sternly. "There is a man in this camp who holds you in his power."

Dick Dodds winced and turned pale.

"No, no!" he protested. "You have no right to say that."

"Oh, yes, I have," and the Dandy Sport laughed grimly. "Come, now, Dodds; I have discovered your secret, and you would better make a clean breast of it."

"I dare not!"

"I will intercede with Raymond, and secure your release from the conspiracy charge against you."

"That is a promise?"

"Yes, sir; and it will be kept."

A hopeful look crossed the prisoner's face. He reflected a moment, then his head sank dejectedly.

"I would like to oblige you, Mr. Goldspur, but the risk is too great."

"Do not fear. Stamm is out of Red Gulch, and will not return for several weeks, if ever."

That was a random shot. That it struck home Goldspur quickly saw, for Dick Dodds leaped to his feet, hoarsely demanding:

"Is that true? On your honor, man, is it true?"

"It is absolutely true."

"And your promise stands?"

"Yes, sir."

"I will not be held here as a witness?"

"You may make an affidavit, and depart."

The ex-deputy uttered a long breath of relief.

"Very well, Mr. Goldspur. I will make a clean breast of it—and mighty glad of the chance, too, as the matter now stands," he declared.

"Stamm was the man. He wanted you and the Mad Miner arrested on some trumped-up charge, and gotten out of Red Gulch. You were to be held at least thirty days."

Goldspur nodded complacently.

"It is just as I suspected," he averred.

"That will do now, Dodds. Keep up your spirits. I'll call with a justice of the peace in the morning, and secure your affidavit. Then I'll see the marshal, and you shall be released."

The Dandy Sport stepped out of the cell-room, bade the jailor good-night, and departed.

As he passed the corner of the building, a number of muffled forms leaped out of the shadows, and in another minute Goldspur was struggling in the grasp of his enemies.

CHAPTER XXV. THE AMERICAN.

The Dandy Sport was not one to yield tamely. He struggled fiercely against the desperate odds besetting him, and his blows fell thick and fast. Two of the ruffians were sent sprawling to the ground, whereupon the others hesitated and seemed to shrink back.

But they were too strong in numbers to meet defeat, and at a word from the chief they closed in upon the sport so quickly that he was unable to draw a weapon.

"Down the whelp, boys!" ordered a hoarse voice. "Down him—smother him! See that he makes no outcry!"

Then Goldspur felt a strong clutch upon his throat, and under the combined weight of his assailants he was slowly forced to the ground.

But at that instant, when success seemed assured to the thugs, a tall form leaped swiftly through the darkness and

plunged into the melee, and a pair of sturdy fists began swinging right and left with fierce and vengeful rapidity.

"Break away, you cowards!" shouted a stern voice, and the thugs, alarmed by that sudden onslaught, shrank for the moment from their prey.

"Steady, boys!—there's only one!" grated the leader, with a bitter oath. "Rally there, and—don't let Goldspur slip!"

But the mischief was done!

Released from that strangling clutch and relieved of the oppressive weight upon his shoulders, the Dandy Sport had leaped to his feet, and now stood back to back with his bold rescuer, a revolver gleaming in each hand.

"Furies! We are balked of the game! Scatter, lads, and hunt cover, before the camp's aroused!"

Even as that command rang from his lips, the leader bounded away through the shadows, followed by a shot from Goldspur's weapon, and in less than a minute the entire band, with the exception of one man, who was stretched on the ground, had disappeared.

"What a cowardly pack!" the sport exclaimed, in contempt, as he turned to his rescuer. "And yet they were desperately in earnest for the moment, and I was faring badly when you so bravely lent a hand."

"Command me, for I am at your service when a favor is needed."

The rescuer laughed good-naturedly.

"That is all right," he assured. "But I wasn't out looking for a reward."

"I have a natural love for the fisticuff game, and as it looked like a splendid opening for a bit of healthy practice, I waded right in."

"Fair play is a jewel," you know, and I couldn't stand back and see a dozen on one."

Then Goldspur started, and warmly grasped his companion's hand.

"Justus Jarrett!" he exclaimed. "Upon my word, I didn't know you!"

"I suspected as much," was the smiling response. "You see, I've been taking your advice, Goldspur. I went to Strong's and put myself in presentable shape, and had just stepped out on the street when you were attacked."

"I am glad it happened so, for I prefer to be of some service while playing this waiting game."

"Well, you certainly have been of service, and earned my lasting gratitude, as I suspect my life was the stake for which the rascals were playing."

"But let's get this chap up, and see if we can induce him to peach."

The fallen ruffian had lifted himself to a sitting posture, and now sat with his hands clasped to his head, groaning dolefully.

In another minute, despite his frantic struggles, he was jerked to his feet and disarmed, then forced toward the calaboose.

Shocky Pete at once opened the door when summoned by Goldspur, and the prisoner was thrust inside.

The keeper had heard the shot. But a pistol shot was no variety in Red Gulch, and he had not bothered his head about it.

Now, however, his eyes opened to their fullest extent as they fell upon the prisoner. A peculiar look crossed his face, and he exclaimed:

"Hallo, Mex! Ye've come ter lodge with me at last, I see!"

"Wal, ye've dodged me for many a day, but I told ye yer time would come, an' shore enough et hes!"

"Don't gloat over my misfortune!" the prisoner cried, with a vivid flash of his black eyes. "Remember that I shall soon be free, and that my knife is keen! Jose is not one to forget a wrong!"

"Oh, I'll not firgit, Hosay!" the jailor retorted, and then at a sign from Goldspur he passed out of the room and closed the door.

"Now, Jose, sit down there," the sport ordered. "I want to talk with you."

The prisoner, who was a heavily-built,

smooth-faced Mexican, doggedly obeyed, then said:

"Senor, my ears are open."

"What induced you to attack me?"

"The love of gold, senor."

"You were hired?"

"Si, senor."

"By whom?"

"By one I know not. He was in disguise, and he spoke with pebbles in his mouth."

The sport reflected a moment, then asked:

"Was it my life they sought?"

"Not at once, senor, if it could be avoided. You were to be captured and carried away. Later, perhaps, you were to be killed."

"How much were you to receive?"

"Five dollars, senor."

Goldspur drew a double-eagle from his pocket and held it before the eyes of the Mexican.

"Do you see that, Jose?"

"Senor, I am not blind!"

"I will put it in your hand, Jose, and set you free. When you return and tell me who your leader was, five more, just like it, shall be ready for your hand."

The Mexican's eyes sparkled covetously, but he shook his head slowly, saying:

"I am a soldier of fortune, senor, and fight for gold; but I love life better, so cannot do your bidding."

"The man you ask me to seek is too powerful, and his friends are too many. No, no, senor! Jose must refuse."

"Very good; it is as well, perhaps, to keep you here, so I shall go and lodge immediate complaint against you."

"Jarrett, keep your eye on the fellow till I send the jailor in; and if he offers to move, drop him."

Then Goldspur opened the door and joined Shocky Pete outside.

"Jailor, who is that man?" he asked.

"A cut-throat called Mexican Jose."

"He belongs in camp?"

"He comes and goes, I pard Goldspur."

"You have had trouble with him, I infer."

Shocky Pete uttered an angry growl.

"He robbed me when I worked in their placers," he explained. "I carry scars f'm his knife yet."

"Can you hold him until I get a warrant?"

"Ef you say et, you bet," and the jailor tapped his revolver butts significantly.

"Do so, then, and I'll send the document down as soon as possible."

Shocky Pete then entered the calaboose, and the sport and his ally departed.

As soon as their steps had died away, the jailor looked at the prisoner and laughed.

"I thought, fer a minute ye was in ther net, shore an' natural, jedge," he exclaimed.

"It will take an extremely cunning man to entrap me," the pseudo-Mexican boasted, in an arrogant way. "It was fortunate, though, that you caught my signal and adopted the course you did, for it has thrown that accursed sport entirely off his guard."

"Oh, yas; I reckon thet was a putty artful dodge I worked," chuckled the jailor.

"You see, it is highly important for me to be in camp at this time, yet exceedingly risky for me to remain here in my proper person," the prisoner explained. "So Judge Stamm went away yesterday, and Mexican Jose came in to-night."

Shocky Pete chuckled again, and complimented the Rainbow manager on his successful disguise. Then the voices of the two sank to a lower key, and they talked earnestly for several minutes.

When this conversation had ended, the jailor opened the cell-room door and brought out Dick Dodds.

"Well, Dodds, I understand that you have betrayed me to Goldspur," Stamm exclaimed.

The prisoner started, gazed keenly at

the disguised rascal, and a terrified look came into his face.

"There—don't deny it, man!" the judge continued. "I am going to be merciful with you—far more so than you deserve."

"Pete is going to open the door for you. You are to go. If you can be found inside the camp's limits ten minutes from now, your miserable life shall pay the forfeit!"

The jailor threw open the door.

Terror-stricken, Dick Dodds leaped out into the night and sped away.

CHAPTER XXVI.

DADDY PARKER SPEAKS OUT.

When he had secured the warrant for Mexican Jose, Goldspur started Jarrett back to the calaboose with it, and went on to the Gold-Bar Palace.

There, he found Daddy Parker anxiously awaiting him.

The old man's eyes were sparkling feverishly, and he was in a highly nervous condition.

"By your leave, sir!" he exclaimed, cagerly plucking the sport's sleeve. "By your leave, sir! If you will spare me a few minutes of your time, I shall esteem it an especial favor, sir."

"I have something highly important to communicate—yes, sir—highly important!"

Goldspur nodded and smiled.

"I am ready to listen, Mr. Parker," he assured.

"Not here, sir!—not here! It must be in secret. If you will walk over with me to the Grayson residence—"

"That is out of the question, sir," cut in the sport, coldly. "But we can retire to my room."

"Very well, sir. You know best. I am at your disposal."

Goldspur led the way to his room. Pointing Daddy Parker to a seat, he closed the door and sat down.

"You may proceed, Mr. Parker, I am ready to listen," he said.

"I am in trouble—yes, sir, the deepest of trouble," the old man bluntly announced. "I have come to you for help."

"You shall have it, if I can possibly give it."

"I was assured of that, sir, for your face betrays a generous nature and a bold spirit. I knew I would not appeal in vain."

"And now to explain. There is going to be trouble over the Rainbow Mine, and I want to engage you, sir, to take charge of Miss Grayson's interests till the matter is settled."

Goldspur's face flushed, then grew white.

"Does Miss Grayson make that request?" he asked, in a voice of icy coldness.

"No, sir; oh, no! sir. I doubt, indeed, if Miss Grayson knows of your existence. Indeed, she is too badly shaken up over her adventure with the outlaw band to attend to business herself; and feeling the importance of immediate action, I have taken charge of her affairs myself."

"And Dubois, her attorney? What is the matter with him? He has escaped, and is in Red Gulch, I understand."

"Ah, sir! he has proved himself an arrant coward—yes, sir!—an arrant coward! He has been dismissed by my niece, sir—bag and baggage, and has joined the enemy."

"I trust, sir, that you will consider this matter, and give me a favorable answer. You understand, of course, that you are to have full compensation for your services."

The Dandy Sport smiled grimly.

"Really, Mr. Parker, you flatter me," he exclaimed. "Of course, I should be glad to do anything that I can to sustain the cause of your niece; but you must remember that I am a stranger in Red Gulch, and therefore hardly the person you would want in case of trouble."

"Now, I will suggest that you select

some well-known citizen of the camp, say Jubal Strong, for instance. You see, his popularity in itself would lend strength to your cause."

Daddy Parker leaped to his feet. His shrunken old face grew red with rage. He uttered an oath and brandished his fist in the air.

"That scoundrel? Never, sir!—never!" he shouted. "Why, sir, it is an insult—"

"I beg your pardon!" interrupted Goldspur, coldly. "You are talking in riddles to me!"

Instantly sobered by the sport's cold voice, Daddy Parker brushed a hand across his eyes, and resumed his seat.

"It is I, sir, who should beg pardon," he asserted, in a subdued tone. "In my excitement, I forgot that you were not acquainted with all the facts."

"In confidence, sir, I will tell you that Strong is an abominable villain—yes, sir—a most abominable villain! I may say, further, sir, that I discovered to-day that he is my son-in-law; that his true name is Charles Middleton, and that in his true character he is Cherokee Charlie, the outlaw!"

Goldspur gazed keenly at the old man.

"You astonish me, sir!" he exclaimed.

"I was astonished myself," Parker returned, and he related all that he had learned from Agatha and Helen Middleton.

It is almost needless to say that the Dandy Sport was nonplussed. Although he had learned to regard the mayor with some little doubt, he was not prepared to believe him the guilty wretch Parker declared him to be. He felt there was a grave mistake somewhere.

"It certainly looks black for Strong," he was forced to admit.

"You see, sir, we are in a terrible plight," Daddy Parker continued. "Con is missing, and so invidious has the work of these scoundrels been that I may say, barring yourself, we have not a friend in Red Gulch capable of assuming charge of our affairs."

"June was disposed to favor us against Stamm, but he is a warm personal friend of Dubois, and that ties his hands."

"Stamm is in possession of the Rainbow books, and if he seizes the mine, as I fear he intends to do, we may as well give up the fight as lost, and that means financial ruin to Miss Grayson and her brother."

"Stamm would certainly have a powerful hold upon the property," Goldspur admitted. "Still, as he is out of Red Gulch and likely, I understand, to remain away for some weeks, much can be accomplished during his absence."

"But he's not absent!" cried Daddy Parker, striking his knee with his clenched hand. "That's only a cunning blind. It hasn't been two hours since I passed him in front of the hotel. He was cleanly shaven and disguised as a Mexican."

Instantly Goldspur's thoughts reverted to the prisoner, Mexican Jose, and he sprang to his feet.

"By heavens! I believe that is the truth!" he averred, visibly impressed.

"Yes, sir! I'll swear it's true! I know the villain like a book—yes, sir—like a book, and I could swear to his eyes anywhere."

And Daddy Parker began to dance about excitedly.

"Steady, now!" warned the Dandy Sport. "Don't raise such a racket, or we'll have listeners right at the door."

"Sit down there. I want to talk with you. I want you to speak right out, fully and plainly."

Daddy Parker obeyed, and Goldspur put him through a rigid course of questioning, dealing with the history of the mine, the brief captivity of Agatha, and the events throwing such a shadow of guilt upon Jubal Strong.

When these points had been fully covered, the sport bent his head in thought a moment, then suddenly asked:

"If Con Grayson should die before

coming of age, would his share in the mine revert to Miss Grayson?"

"Yes—or what is left of it."

"And his death, through terminating Stamm's guardianship would enable action upon the marriage clause in Gabriel's will?"

"Yes, sir. But I don't believe Gabe ever left any such will."

"The court has pronounced the will valid, you must remember, and under such a decision its provisions are binding until a different verdict from a higher court is gained."

"Miss Grayson, you say, has declined to marry Stamm?"

"Yes, sir; most emphatically. She will fight the will."

"Has it ever occurred to you that Gabriel Grayson might yet be living?"

"I've always considered him dead, sir."

"Then you accept Stamm's story of his death?"

"Yes; Lumper swears it is true."

Goldspur's lip curled slightly.

"Stamm's game is as clear as day," he declared. "He believes Con Grayson is dead. Before many hours he will seize the mine, then bring action, under the will, to secure Miss Grayson's share."

"There is not an hour to be lost, Mr. Parker!"

In alarm, Daddy Parker again sprang up.

"You—you will aid us, Mr. Goldspur?" he asked, betraying painful agitation.

"To the last drop of my heart's blood!" was the vehement answer. Then, coldly: "But mark you, Mr. Parker, not one word of my connection with the case must reach Miss Grayson!"

"Remember, too, that hereafter you are to remain away from me. My friend, Hercules Redrock, will have charge of the matter, and you can consult with him."

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE JAILOR IN TROUBLE.

For a moment, Daddy Parker seemed incapable of speech or action. He sat silent and motionless, staring blankly at the face of the sport. Then hurried steps sounded in the hall, and some one rapped on the door.

In response to a summons to enter, Justus Jarrett stepped into the room. His dark eyes were glittering with suppressed excitement, and that he bore intelligence of a startling nature the sport read at a glance.

Goldspur at once made his two visitors acquainted, and motioned Jarrett to a seat, tersely explaining:

"You may speak freely before Mr. Parker, Jarrett. He represents the Rainbow owners."

"I will do so, sir," Jarrett responded.

"Mexican Jose has escaped, and with him Dodds, the ex-deputy."

"Aha! This is news indeed, Jarrett!"

"They assaulted and overpowered the jailor, I suppose?"

"So he states, sir."

"You doubt the statement?"

Jarrett nodded assent.

"I found him on the floor, apparently unconscious, but my faith in his veracity is not strong," he explained. "There was an absence of serious wounds or bruises, and I feel that his condition was feigned."

"Moreover, you will remember that Dodds was in the cell-room with the door locked, while the Mexican, disarmed, was in the living room with the jailor."

"Now, Shocky Pete was well armed, and looks to be a man of desperate courage, so it is not at all probable that the Mexican succeeded in overpowering him."

"You reason well, Jarrett, yet it could have happened through carelessness on the jailor's part, for the Mexican, I believe, is a quick-witted scoundrel and thoroughly desperate."

"Yes, there is always the odd chance, sir," Jarrett admitted. "But there is one point upon which I have not touched, as yet."

"I found the cell-room door locked and the bars in place, while the key itself was in the jailor's pocket.

"Now, sir, the Mexican knew that we had gone for a warrant and would not be long absent, and I cannot believe he would have lost time in observing such painstaking care had his liberty been gained by force."

"That is quite true, Jarrett, unless possibly he intended to throw suspicion upon the jailor," the Dandy Sport observed.

"But I believe you have read the case aright, and hereafter we shall regard Shocky Pete as one of the enemy.

"And now, Jarrett, my friend Redrock tells me you are a bookkeeper."

"I am, sir, and also a stenographer."

"You would be competent, you think, to make an expert examination of the Rainbow books?"

"Yes, sir."

Goldspur smiled complacently, and turned to Daddy Parker.

"It would be well for you to suggest to Miss Grayson the discharge of Simeon Paully and the employment of Mr. Jarrett," he remarked, significantly.

"Yes, sir; that is true. I will do it—I will do it at once," declared the old man, rising. "Sim Paully is a scoundrel, sir.

"In the meantime, Mr. Goldspur, I shall remember your instructions, and leave the management of the affair entirely in your hands."

Then Daddy Parker departed.

"Now, Jarrett, you may go down-stairs and look up Gold Dick," the sport continued, turning to his ally. "Remain there, but have him locate Paully at once if possible, and report his whereabouts to Redrock, who will probably join you soon."

Jarrett bowed, and silently withdrew. He felt that some important move was about to be made, but sensibly refrained from useless inquiry.

He found Gold Dick sitting at a table near the foot of the stairway, and explained Goldspur's wishes, whereupon the miner-detective rose and hurried out into the street.

A moment later the Dandy Sport appeared. Pausing for a word with Jarrett, he, too, passed out into the night.

Straight to the calaboose the sport hastened, and pounded sharply on the door.

A faint shuffling sound came from within, then the wicket opened and the face of Shocky Pete appeared, peeping out cautiously.

"Hallo, Pete! Open the door," Goldspur greeted, in assumed excitement. "I want to talk to you."

The jailor obeyed, and the sport stepped into the room. Then:

"Jarrett tells me you have had bad luck."

"Terrible!" and the rascal wagged his head dolefully. "Got a crack on ther skull w'ot laid me out till et was all over but ther shoutin'."

"Ye see, Dodds made sech a racket on ther door thet I jumped up an' tarning my head, when thet blamed Mexican hit me a jolt with his stool.

"Et's ther fust time I ever had sech a low-down trick played on me, an' I kalkilate ter make thet Greaser fairly sick when I gits my two hands on him!"

And the fellow scowled in a fear-inspiring manner.

"Oh, I wouldn't get mad about it, if I were you," Goldspur observed, in a cool and bantering tone. "It does seem singular, though, that a man of Stamm's standing should stoop so low.

"Do you know, Pete, that from what I heard after you closed the door I've come to the conclusion that you are a miserable scoundrel?"

The jailor changed color, and trembled violently. The sport had drawn a revolver, which he flourished menacingly.

"Yes, sir-ree! And I calculate that you have gotten yourself into an extremely bad box," he continued, as he noted the effect of his cunning threat. "I don't think shooting is a bit too severe for a man who will play such a trick as you have been guilty of.

"Now, you sit down there and make a clean breast of it, or it shall be the worse for you."

Shocky Pete was a desperate ruffian, but there was something in the cool and determined attitude of the sport which filled him with terror.

Down he sat, and then in trembling tones confessed the liberation of Stamm and Dick Dodds.

"Now, what hold has Stamm upon you?" the sport demanded.

Pete hesitated.

"Pard, will ye spare my life ef I tells yer all I knows?" he ventured at length, in a craven tone.

"Yes, for I have no wish to shed your blood if it can be avoided."

"Lordy! I'm glad ter hear ye say thet, pard, fer ye looks 'kill,' an' I believe ye meant et, too!"

"Now, I'll tell ye all I knows, an' then mebbe ye'll hide me f'm Stamm, fer he'll kill me shore when he finds out I hes peached.

"Ye see, I belongs ter ther Rainbow Rogues."

"The Rainbow Rogues, eh? Explain what you mean," Goldspur requested, visibly interested.

"Et's a secret band, pard, an' works ther camps an' trails fer gold an' booty."

"And Stamm is chief, you say?"

"I hain't said so, but ye hit ther truth plumb center, pard, fer Stamm is ther head chief, or camp chief, es we calls him, while Cherokee Charlie is ther trail chief, an' between ther two work is plenty for us.

"Ye see, ther men aire hired by ther month, an' sworn never ter betray ther Rogues. All wear masks when they meet an' none but ther chiefs knows who aire members, while ther men do not know who ther chiefs r'ally aire."

"But you know, Pete?"

"Oh, yas, an' ther two chiefs meet right hyar when thar is mischief ter plot."

"In the calaboose?"

"Yes, pard."

A grim smile played over Goldspur's expressive face.

"It is a queer place for a rogue's headquarters, yet one in which they should certainly feel at home," he remarked.

"And, now, Pete, who is the second chief?"

"Cherokee Charlie, ye means?"

"Exactly."

"Honestly, pard, I don't know fer sure. Ye see, he comes disguised. He dresses like one o' these hyar gospel sharps, an' wears big goggles; an' he looks like an old man, fer his ha'r an' beard aire long an' gray, though his voice is strong an' full."

"Yet you suspect his identity?"

"Oh, yas; I hes always hed it down he war Jubal Strong."

"The mayor, eh?"

"Thet's ther man, pard."

At that moment a peculiar tapping sounded on the door, and the jailor's face grew white with terror.

"Lordy, pard! They is out thar now!" he exclaimed, in a sepulchral whisper.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

ENTRAPPED AT LAST.

Undisturbed by that startling announcement, the Dandy Sport glanced coolly around the room, then turned to Shocky Pete and in a low voice said:

"Unlock the cell-room door, set the bars inside, and give me the key, then admit them.

"I am going in there to hear what these rascals say, and if you betray me by word or sign, it will be the worse for you!"

Utterly cowed by the look of intense determination on Goldspur's face, the jailor silently obeyed, and handed him the key.

Entering the cell-room, the sport placed the door ajar, then seated himself beside it, weapon in hand.

Scarcely had he settled himself comfortably when Pete threw open the outer

door and admitted Stamm and the road-agent chief.

The Rainbow manager was now disguised as a miner.

"You move with leaden feet to-night, Shocky," he grumbled. "Just when time is valuable, too!"

"Lordy, boss! but I is narvous," the fellow responded, in quivering tones.

"You have had callers, eh?"

"Fer shore! Fu'st come ther dark-lookin' stranger with ther warrant, an' he putt me through a hull catechism.

"When he was gone, ther Dandy Sport popped in, an' he was a terror."

"He suspected something?"

"Shore, an' nacherel!"

"But you dropped no hint?"

"Nary, though he caught ther drop on me, an' I was sore puzzled to throw dust into his eyes."

Stamm swore volubly, and turned to his companion.

"We must get rid of that fellow at any hazard," he declared. "Three times has the trick been tried, in one way and another, and still he is at large.

"From the moment he came into camp with the Mad Miner, he has been secretly meddling with the Rainbow affair, and is a constant menace to our plans."

"Yes, that is true," the road-agent assented, in a voice that made the hidden listener start. "He is a dangerous man."

"I am confident, too, that he is the one who played the Lone Bandit game," Stamm continued. "That makes him the more dangerous, for he discovered your men on the Big Nugget trail and later, while off my guard, entrapped me into admissions which will surely convince him that we are secret allies.

"Yes, yes! we must rid ourselves of him, and I will lay the plot before the night is over."

Then Stamm ordered the jailor to take up a position outside the door, and with the road-agent retreated to a corner of the room, where they sat down, and talked in whispers.

Goldspur strained his ears to hear what was said, but vainly.

Nearly a half-hour passed thus, then they summoned the jailor and departed.

The sport, with the bars in his hand, at once stepped out of the cell-room.

"Pete, you have done well," he remarked, briskly. "But I am not prepared to trust you, just yet.

"Hold out your hands!"

Trembling violently, the jailor obeyed, and in another minute he was securely manacled.

Goldspur then disarmed him, and relieved him of his keys.

"I am going to lock you up," the sport announced. "If you behave yourself you'll get off lightly; if you don't, it will go hard with you.

"Now, go into the cell-room, and keep quiet. There will be a man here in a few minutes to take your place as jailor."

Shocky Pete stumbled blindly into the prison. Goldspur carefully secured the door, put out the light, locked up, and departed.

The moon was shining brightly, and the sport was in time to see Stamm and his confederate crossing the foot bridge over Black Bear Creek.

Without an instant's hesitation, he followed. The two men walked onward leisurely, and finally entered Sailor Jake's Haven.

Passing around to the rear door, Goldspur stepped into the place, and glanced over the crowd.

Seated at a table near by were three men, one of whom he recognized as Elephant Eph. The others he knew not, but correctly concluded they were Dubois and the bookkeeper Simeon Paully.

Beyond them, in the crowd, stood Gold Dick.

A moment later Stamm and the road-agent appeared, and joined the trio at the table, and the five at once began a low-voiced consultation.

Goldspur made no attempt to listen. Contenting himself with a quiet and unobtrusive scrutiny of each face, he gave a scarcely perceptible sign to the miner-detective, and passed on through the long room and out into the street.

Gold Dick followed, and the two men draw off into the shadows.

"How goes it, Dick?" the sport asked.

"They aire plottin', pard Goldspur. Thar is mischief in ther air."

"I believe you, and we must plot to balk them."

"Go, now, and have Trumps come here to take your place shadowing Pauly, and then go over and pick out a dozen reliable men, choosing as many as possible from the Rainbow force, known to be loyal to the Graysons. Have them report to Redrock at the Gold-Bar Palace as rapidly as you select them."

"Until Trumps arrives, I will keep an eye on Pauly."

"That will leave Con Grayson alone with Ducky Dan," Gold Dick suggested.

"For the time being, yes. But it can't be helped. Pauly must be closely watched until he is holed for the night, then seized and spirited away."

"I will do jest what ye say, pard Goldspur, fer I sees ye hev some deep game on foot."

No further words were wasted. Gold Dick hurried away. The Sport stood silent and motionless a moment, engrossed in thought, then turned back to The Haven.

Just as he reached the door, Stamm and Elephant Eph stepped out. At the same instant three men suddenly appeared from around the corner of the building.

Each of the five grasped a pistol in his right hand, and with one accord the five weapons were raised to a level.

A single sweeping glance sufficed to show the Dandy Sport that he was fairly within the toils, the victim of a cunningly-laid trap!

"Steady! Don't stir!—don't chirrup!" uttered Elephant Eph, in a low and deadly tone. "Move but an inch, and down you go! I reckon there's enough, right here, to swear each other clear!"

Before the Sport could utter so much as a word, a heavy sack was skillfully flung over his head, and closed tightly around his neck by means of a slip-cord. Then a powerful hand grasped each wrist, and he was hurried away.

The course of the ruffians was down stream, and they exercised care to keep as well within the shadows as possible. A quarter of a mile below the camp they halted with their victim upon the verge of a bluff overhanging a deep and dangerous whirlpool in the creek.

"This is the place, boys," Elephant Eph announced, grimly. "Off with that bag, for it will betray foul play if found upon his corpse."

The order was quickly obeyed. Then the butt of a heavy revolver fell upon the head of the half-smothered sport. Staggering back, he slipped over the verge and whirled down into the seething waters!

CHAPTER XXIX.

MURAT EFFECTS A RESCUE.

Let us turn now to a scene long neglected, yet most important—that which occurred between Weeping Mose and Murat, the Mad Miner, in that secret recess of the outlaw's den.

It will be remembered that a wild yell of terror burst from Lumper's lips when the old miner so suddenly appeared—a yell which rang through every portion of the cavern, and interrupted the hurried conversation between Agatha Grayson and Orrville Dubois.

The effect of this cry upon the Mad Miner was electrical. With a single, swift, cat-like leap, he cleared the intervening space and crouched with his knees bearing upon the prostrate captive's breast.

"Fool! Do you want to die?" he grated, his black eyes gleaming savagely,

while the muzzle of the cocked revolver in his hand bore firmly against Lumper's low forehead. "Don't you know you were brought here to meet your death? I came to give you a chance for life, yet you would fritter that chance away!"

"Silence, now, and listen: You have alarmed the band—they are coming! Betray me, and I shall reap revenge, swift and sure, for all your miserable treachery!"

"And—you know me?"

An assenting shudder answered that finally-significant query. Then Murat rose and swiftly retreated.

Hardly had the friendly shadows closed round his gaunt but powerful form when Cherokee Charlie, followed by two members of his band, bounded lightly into the recess and crouched over the captive.

"What's the trouble?" the outlaw chief demanded, peering with keen suspicion, at Lumper's ghastly face. "Speak out, man, for—has the mad devil been here again?"

"What-fer—Ugh! No—snakes!" shuddered Weeping Mose, closing his blood-shot eyes to shut out that searching gaze.

"Snakes? That is it, you are sure, man?"

"Yas! Ugh! Fer ther love o' marcy, drive—"

Laughing shortly, Cherokee sprang to his feet without awaiting the end of that sniveled plea.

"It's Red Gulch whisky, lads, so take warning," he chuckled. "Strike a light, and beat about a bit; it may help to ease his addled brain."

Then again he sank beside the captive, and with hand on shoulder shook him roughly.

"Let be such rackets, Lumper," he growled, in menace. "Understand, your life isn't worth a penny shoestring, just now!"

"I never—"

"And never will, you addle-pated donkey, if blow the game's your meaning! I'm hand in glove with your precious master, and—shall I say it right straight out, or leave your imagination at play? Eh, my poor, old Mose?"

Something in that vicious-purring voice roused the captive's wavering courage. With a sudden writhing of his lank body he rose to a sitting posture, and blinked inquiringly at the crouching outlaw.

"Dern an' double-dern ye!" he sniveled, in a burst of fury, his voice rising shrilly. "Ye can't say too much ner too hard fer me, Jube Strong—mind thet! I've played dead straight with both ther jedge an' you, when hed I bin hafe your-size cur I'd 'a' hanged ye both!"

"Too bad! Moses!"

"Thar hain't no 'too bad' about it! I seed at once I was in fer a double-bank when ther hold-up came, fer 'twasn't ther game ther jedge laid down ter me. But I hain't hollered. Tain't me ter yelp, hands-tied, at a dirty sneak's game!"

"Oh, no! not you!" gritted Cherokee, a sudden gleam of anger showing in his black eyes. "And yet—Stamm didn't trust you—don't trust you—never will trust you! You know too much for such an addle-pate, so down comes your wool-box! You understand?"

Mose sullenly inclined his head.

"Et's ther Grayson matter, o' course," he grumbled. "Yet, I drove home ther fust wedge in ther game, an' et was share, an' share alike. But, now—" He choked with fury.

"But now it's different, eh? Just so!" sneeringly. "You're not to be trusted. The snap-shot at Goldspur showed that. Suppose your lead had gone home true—what then. The United States marshal was fairly at his heels in the Grayson interest, and more than one neck would have stretched hemp!"

"You played straight for your own turn-down, Mose, and it came! The program was changed, and you're safely in hoc, and put to stay till Stamm can get

here to see you. After that—well, you know the judge!"

"You know, too, I'm not on the Grayson deal, except for the pay I get, and that it's no grease out of my skillet whether you live or die. So I say: No more such rackets, if you value life!"

Laughing lightly, Cherokee sprang up and back from his captive, then with hands on knees stooped and peered sharply at his haggard, rage-distorted face and glowing eyes.

"Don't take it so hard, Moses, dear!" he chirruped, gayly. "I dare say you've slit many a throat in your day, and it doesn't become you to flinch, now that your turn draws near!"

Uttering a despairing groan, Lumper shrank back.

"When—when does Stamm come?" he asked, in a changed tone.

"Dear soul! Why ask that useless question? How can I say? I only know we are to hold up the Big Nugget stage to-morrow, relieve the judge of the pay due us, and slip a note into his pocket, saying we have you here, and the girl!"

"Now, compose yourself, and think seriously of your impending fate, for, upon my word, your hours are growing short!"

With a mocking bow, Cherokee Charlie turned, called to the two men to follow him, and quickly left the gloomy recess.

Lumper was in an agony of fear. He felt that a vein of seriousness and truth ran through the outlaw's grim and heartless badinage, and that his fate was certainly sealed—barring a very slender chance of escape!

For the moment, he wholly forgot the Mad Miner's presence within the cavern, and it was not until a number of pebbles, dislodged by a creeping body, fell from a ledge in the wail near by that he recalled the fact that he was not alone. Then he started violently, and choked back a cry of alarm.

"Utter no sound!" warned Murat, peering down at the groveling wretch. "While you richly merit death at my hands, I am here not to harm you, but to effect your release."

"But you must first swear to obey my orders, or I shall go my way and leave you to your fate."

"I do sw'ar et, Gabe—I do sw'ar et!" whined Lumper. "An' I cuss ther day I listened ter Stamm an' lifted my hand ag'in ye!"

"There! That will do. Not another word! Remember, too, that I am Murat!"

"Yas, yas, ole pard!"

The next minute the Mad Miner stealthily descended from the ledge, and at once examined the irons confining the captive.

"They cannot be removed here," he muttered. "I have no key, nor can I smash the lock or break the manacles without raising an alarm."

The captive uttered a despairing groan. "Silence!" hissed Murat, savagely, a wild glow leaping into his fathomless eyes.

Then he passed his hand across his brows, and gazed around, much like one stupefied by some powerful drug.

"Where am I? Where am I?" he muttered, dreamily. "Yes, yes! I know, now. That is the adit, yonder. It is early, but the men are going in to work. I must go with them. I must see what they do. They are plotting something."

He shaded his eyes and peered sharply through the gloom, then with swift, noiseless steps sped away.

Hopelessly, Lumper stared after him.

"Clean crazy," he ejaculated, after a moment. "Cuss me, ef et don't sarve me jest right, too, fer I hed a hand in ther very leetle game!"

"He's gone off, now, an' ther jig's up fer when he comes to, he'll never think ter come back hyar. Sarves me right, too!"

Whereupon, the rascal stretched himself on the rough stone floor and gave himself up to bitter reflections.

The hours wore slowly away, and Lumper finally fell asleep. How long he slept

he had no means of knowing; but some time after nightfall he was awakened by a peculiar vibration of his chains, which was accompanied with a faint, metallic, clicking sound.

Lying quite still, he peered sharply through the intense gloom, and at length succeeded in making out the outlines of a man standing between himself and the wall.

Then, suddenly, came the hoarsely whispered challenge:

"Hist! Are you awake?"

"Yas."

"Get up, then, but make no sound."

"This chain is fast to an iron picket pin cemented into a crevice of the wall. I have picked the cement away with my knife, and we must now pull the pin out."

"Grip the chain with me, and pull slowly and steadily."

With a sharply drawn breath of relief, Moses Lumper obeyed. There was a strong, steady pull, followed by a violent wrench, and the pin slipped from the crevice.

At the same instant the cold muzzle of a revolver was pressed against Lumper's head, and in a stern voice Murat ordered:

"Come! Keep right at my side and hold those chains so they will not clank."

"Use care, for if an alarm is given I'll blow a hole straight through you!"

CHAPTER XXX.

A PECULIAR ACCIDENT.

Trembling in every fibre, Weeping Mose yet brought each action into perfect keeping with the Mad Miner's mandates, and the two succeeded in passing from the cavern undetected, and at once plunged into the thicket in which we have seen the outlaw's wife and Agatha Grayson take refuge.

The moon had not yet risen. The faint starlight failed to pierce the dense gloom clothing the mountain-side, and the fugitives were compelled fairly to feel their way through that tangled growth.

For upward of an hour, they held steadily onward, then came out upon the banks of a canyon, and further progress was barred.

"We must wait for the moon," Murat declared. "Sit down there on the rock. Do not move, nor attempt to escape. There—that will do."

"Now, tell me how it came you were a prisoner."

Lumper reflected a moment. He dreaded to arouse Murat's anger, yet concluded that his best possible course, just then, would be to make a clean breast of the affair and throw himself upon the old miner's mercy.

"Come!" ordered Murat, sharply. "Don't pause to study up a lie, but out with the truth."

"I was jest goin' to, pard, but didn't know whar ter begin," returned Mose, humbly.

"Ye see, yer gal—yer darter, she hired me—"

"My girl—my daughter?"

"'At's what I said, pard Gabe. Ye see—"

"Man, do you mean to tell me my daughter is in Red Gulch?"

"Oh, Lawd! no. I wishes she was!"

"For a mortal fac', Gabe, she's back thar in ther cave!"

For fully a minute Murat did not speak. His firm jaws shut with a click, and he clenched his hands savagely. Then he turned fiercely upon the trembling wretch, and in tones quivering with suppressed fury demanded:

"Is she there through fault of yours, or fault of Stamm's?"

"Speak out, man, or by the Eternal! I'll crush the life out of your miserable carcass!"

"Let be, pard!—let be! I never—so help me—"

"Out with it!"

"I never took her thar—never! Et was all Stamm's fault! Let be, pard! My throat—let be! Ah-h!"

"Don't lie to me! Out with the truth!" and Murat loosed his grip and shrank

back a pace, with eyes gleaming hotly through the darkness.

"I'll tell all—all! On'y—don't! She hired me ter take her ter ther Hermit Miner's claim, this mornin', an' Stamm hired Cherokee ter capture us both."

"Is that—"

"'At's gospel, Gabe!" hurriedly. "Smash off these hyar irons, an' give me a gun, an' I'll go back with ye! We'll get her."

Murat laughed harshly.

"Trust you?—never! Hound! Why didn't you tell me she was there?"

"Your orders, boss—I didn't dare speak!"

The words were lost upon Murat, evidently. He stood with head bowed, and seemed to be thinking deeply. For some little time he stood thus, then started slightly, and exclaimed:

"Yes, I'll do it! I will return to the cave and rescue her, for every moment is of value now."

"Lumper, you will remain here till I return."

"An' these irons, boss—cain't ye—"

"You deserve to wear them, and they must remain for the present. I am going to rescue my daughter. If I fail to return by noon to-morrow, you may consider that I am lost, and do the best you can."

A groan of terror came from the wretch.

"Don't try et, Gabe!" he pleaded. "Don't leave me hyar, this way! Knock off these irons, an' I'll sw'ar ter help ye."

Laughing in sheer bitterness of spirit, Murat turned and glided away, without answering that sniveling cry, and in another minute Moses Lumper was alone.

He sat with head bowed, listening patiently until the Mad Miner's retreating steps had passed beyond hearing, then cautiously rose and glanced around.

A chuckle, suppressed and almost inaudible, came from his wide, cruel mouth, and twin gleams of fire shot from the twinkling little orbs half hidden by his granulated eyelids.

"Foolished once ag'in!" he muttered. "But, cuss him! why c'u'dn't he 'a' knocked these hyar irons off an' given me a full chaine fer a git-even?"

"Now, I'm foot-loose, but hand-tied, an' et's a measly load ter tote ter Red Gulch, fer ter camp I've got ter git, under kiver, an' git ther blacksmith ter work on these hyar bracelets, then skip—though I'd like most doosid well ter chuck a boulder inter ther gear-wheel o' Stamm's pet scheme—dern him!"

Thus musing, the rascal advanced to the edge of the bank and peered down into the gloomy depths.

"'Tain't more'n a ravine," he muttered, kicking a loose stone over the verge and listening intently. "Twenty feet, I reckon; no more fer shore. Ef my hands were loose, I'd chaine a tumble on et, for I ben't in love with losin' time, right now."

"But the moon will make light in an hour, an' thet'll give me lead enough ter steer cl'ar o' ole Gabe, fer I reckon at his best he cain't make et back in less'n three or four hours."

Then Lumper returned to the boulder, crouched down, and patiently waited. The moon had risen, and, in little less than the time he had estimated, it swung clear of the peaks off to the east, and threw a flood of light up on his surroundings.

Again the rascal advanced to the verge and peered down, then exclaimed:

"Et's jest as I thought—a ravine not more'n twenty feet deep. Et's an ugly drop on this side, but ther other shelves off, an' I c'u'd git out dead easy."

"Now, ef I goes on up, ther higher I goes ther wuss et'll git; ef I keeps down hill, I'll be travelin' right inter ther Red Gulch trail fu'st thing I know, an' thet won't do, fer I've got ter keep under kiver."

"No, no; I'll cross right hyar, keep along ther mountain till I reaches Big Pass, cut through et ter Black Bear Creek, an' right up stream an' inter camp."

"I'll swing over right hyar, drap on-ter thet ledge hafe-way down, an' f'm thar drop ter ther bottom. I kin do ther trick ef I'm keerful, an' hyar goes fer ter cheat ole Gabe once more."

So saying, the ruffian knelt, and carefully lowered himself over the sharp verge. For a moment he hung at full length, swaying slightly, then released his hold and shot downward.

Thereupon, the unexpected happened.

The picket pin attached to the chain dangling from his manacles had caught in a crevice in a slightly projecting portion of the wall. When his weight came upon it with a jerk, a mass of the rock crumbled off, descending with stunning force upon his head, and he fell from the ledge to the bottom of the ravine.

A single sharp cry of pain and terror pealed from his lips, and then he lost consciousness.

For a long time he lay thus—a senseless heap, maimed and bleeding. The moon had begun the downward half of her course ere so much as a groan to indicate the return of life and sensibility passed his bloodless lips. Then, the face of Murat suddenly appeared at the top of the bluff, and a moment later he dropped lightly upon the ledge, and thence to the bottom.

A hasty examination disclosed the fact that Lumper had sustained a number of serious injuries, and the old miner shook his head ruefully.

"It's his last fit of sickness, I reckon," he muttered. "There's no more bad whisky—no more devilment—for him, and I can't see that the world's any the worse off."

"Still, I can't let him die here, like a dog. I must get him up, and away. He knows much that I must hear, if possible."

Murat set to work quickly. A small stream coursed through the ravine, and a few dashes of cold water restored consciousness to the suffering wretch. The miner then explained what he intended to do, and Lumper gave a feeble assent.

A few minutes later, the Mad Miner started down the ravine, bearing Weeping Mose upon his broad shoulders.

CHAPTER XXXI.

A GLIMPSE OF THE PAST.

Halting, at intervals, to put down his almost lifeless burden and rest, Murat plodded pluckily onward until the night was spent and the forenoon well advanced, when he came suddenly upon an abandoned dug-out.

He hailed this shelter, rude as it was, with a long breath of relief; for he was almost exhausted, and he felt, too, that if Lumper's wounds were not speedily dressed he would die with his secrets untold.

The dug-out door was open, and the Mad Miner at once passed inside and carefully stretched the wounded ruffian on the cool earthen floor, where he made him as comfortable as possible.

The flushed and swollen face and stertorous breathing told Murat as plainly as so many words could have done it that the end of Moses Lumper's career was dangerously near.

"It may have all been for nothing, after all," he muttered, staring down at the maimed form of the mirobund. "Better, perhaps, to have let him die where he fell."

Then he turned away, walked moodily to the door and looked out.

The dug-out stood near the mouth of a ravine opening into a narrow, heavily-timbered valley, and set at such an angle in the slope as to command, from the door and the rear window, a fairly good view of both ravine and valley.

Just as Murat stepped out, a rattling volley of rifle shots came from the timber, to be quickly followed by an answering volley from up the ravine, and a moment later two well-armed men broke from cover and started rapidly toward the dug-out.

"Hold hard, there! Do not close that door!" sternly ordered the foremost, as Murat leaped back. "We are officers of the law, seeking cover."

Then, amid a perfect storm of bullets from timber and ravine, both men bounded quickly into the dug-out, and closed and fastened the door.

Murat had retreated to a corner of the gloomy retreat, but now, with each pistol-armed hand thrown to a level, he boldly faced the intruders.

"Prove your story!" he cried, sternly. "You may be officers, or you may be outlaws! Speak out, but don't attempt to draw!"

"By heavens! man; you'll find our word good," was the quick and fearless response. "I am United States Marshal Raymond, and this man is Deputy Ruggles."

"In scouting through these hills, we became separated from our posse, and were attacked by Cherokee Charlie and his men, for whom we were searching."

"That sounds straight, and I'll take your word," Murat rejoined. "I know these hills are full of outlaws."

"They are, indeed."

"But, now, sir, who are you?"

"I, sir, am Murat."

"The Mad Miner?"

"I am sometimes called that, I believe."

Raymond smiled, then said:

"It is a misnomer. You are certainly as sane at this moment as I am."

"I am not always so. Indeed, it is only at times and briefly that I have a full consciousness of who I am and what I have endured."

"That wretch there is familiar with my wrongs—yes, was an instrument in their perpetration, and I have brought him here to hear his confession."

As he uttered the words, Murat pointed to Lumper.

"He is your prisoner, then?" Raymond asked.

"No; he is Death's prisoner, for he is dying."

"He was captured yesterday by Cherokee Charlie, but was released by me last night. I left him on the bank of a canyon and returned to the outlaw's den to rescue my daughter, but failed to find her. On my return, I found Lumper at the bottom of the canyon and brought him here."

Raymond shuddered.

"He will certainly die," he declared, after a brief examination of the unconscious sufferer.

"Ruggles, you keep a bright look-out for the outlaws. I wish to talk to Murat a bit."

"Correct, sir," the deputy responded. "They're not in sight at present."

The marshal again turned to the old miner, and asked:

"Is your daughter a captive?"

"She was yesterday, but I could not find her last night. She may have been returned to Red Gulch."

"She lives there, then?"

"So Lumper tells me."

"Her name is Agatha Grayson?"

"Yes."

"You, then, are really Gabriel Grayson?"

"I am; yes, sir."

"Murat, you puzzle me! Knowing yourself to be the missing miner, why haven't you come forward, acknowledged your identity, and claimed your property?"

Murat gazed keenly at the officer.

"Can I trust you?" he asked, simply.

"You can, sir," Raymond replied.

"Then, sir, I will tell you. I have been mad for years, and the victim of a large conspiracy."

"You are sane now."

"For the time only. Presently I shall lapse into madness. Yet, I know that I am Gabriel Grayson, and that I own the Rainbow Mine in Red Gulch."

"I concede as much."

"I discovered and opened this mine before Red Gulch was an established camp; and emptied eleven years. We

were attacked by Indians one night, and of the twelve, Stamm, Lumper and myself were the only ones who escaped. The wounds I received in that fight affected my mind, and until a month ago I did not have a single lucid interval."

"Believing that I was incurable, Stamm and Lumper plotted to rid themselves of me and get possession of the mine. So, I was carried into the mountains about two hundred miles to the northward, and abandoned."

"The heartless scoundrels!" exclaimed Raymond, indignantly. "Death itself would have been far more merciful."

"Yes, and I have never understood their motive for so doing, for we were alone in the hills, and no one would have been the wiser had they finished the work the red-skins begun."

"Thus cast adrift, I hung around the mining camps of that district until about two months ago, when I ventured further into the hills than I had ever been, lost my way, fell sick of fever and came near dying."

"At this time I was found by a roving sport, and nursed back to life, and then came the first recollection of the past."

"Goldspur, my rescuer, became interested in my case. He set patiently to work to get at the truth, and quickly learned enough to convince him that I had been the victim of foul play."

"Then an outfit was procured, and we set out for Red Gulch."

"He had carefully mapped out his line of action, so when within a dozen miles of the Gulch we halted and went into camp, where I was to remain while Goldspur paid a visit to the county sheriff."

Raymond nodded quickly.

"Yes, I met him in the sheriff's office," he averred. "I did not learn his errand, though he discovered mine."

"But proceed, Murat, for your story interests me."

"I am very near done," the old miner returned, gloomily. "During Goldspur's absence, the accursed madness came upon me again, and I left the camp. What followed I do not know. When reason again returned, it was for an hour only, and I found myself again with my new pard, but in bonds. I next became sane yesterday, in the outlaw's cave, when I rescued Lumper."

"And now, sir, having told my story, I have a favor to ask."

"I feel that madness may again return at any moment. Should this happen and Lumper rally during my aberration, I ask you to write down whatever statement he may make, for I believe that he will confess before he dies."

"I will do it, sir," Raymond promised. "But do not alarm yourself, for your fears may not be realized."

"Let be the unhappy past, and bend your mind upon what the future holds for you, for your son and your daughter are both in Red Gulch, while retribution will surely reach Stamm before many days have gone."

Murat shook his head and shivered.

"I hope that you are right, sir," he returned, gloomily. "But I have a presentiment of evil. Something is going to happen soon. I feel that my race is well-nigh run."

At that moment Deputy Ruggles turned his head, and in an ominous voice said:

"Get ready for business, pards!"

"Those fellows have been exchanging signals, and are now descending under cover, in full force!"

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE ATTACK.

"Aha! They are sending a man forward under a flag of truce," Ruggles announced, a moment later, and he pointed his position to Raymond.

A glance across the open side of the door was sufficient to confirm the deputy's statement.

The outlaws in the upper ravine had moved down to a position within a hundred yards of the dug-out, while those from the timber in the valley had advanced almost to the mouth of the ravine.

They numbered an even half-score, and all were well-armed, desperate-looking fellows.

"That is the chief, Cherokee himself," Raymond declared, after a searching scrutiny of the flag-bearer. "He shows it in his dress and bearing."

"I wish he would remove his mask. I would like to see who the fellow really is."

At that juncture, the outlaw halted, waved his white flag, and in a gruff voice shouted:

"Hallo! hallo! Come out, Raymond! I want to talk to you."

"Do not fear, for my men shall not fire a shot until I return to them."

Opening the door, the marshal stepped out, rifle in hand, and said:

"Have your say, Cherokee, for I am here to listen."

"Good! I am glad to find you inclined to reason, for I feared that you would be stubborn, and it is my desire to avoid bloodshed if possible."

"I have come here to demand the immediate surrender of all parties in that dug-out, yourself included."

Raymond's lips curled grimly.

"Indeed! You are anything but modest in your demands, Cherokee!"

"But I have no desire to have my throat cut, just yet, no matter how artistic the job, so decline to consider your demand."

"No harm shall come to you or your men, Raymond, beyond a few days' captivity—I pledge you that!"

"You have no designs, then, against our lives?"

"None whatever, sir."

"Then draw off your men and leave us alone."

"I will, upon one condition: Swear to call in your deputies and to quit this county for thirty days."

"The condition is preposterous. I refuse to accept it."

"Remember, we are asking only what we give—a chance to escape."

"Did I accept, I would scorn myself evermore, so again refuse."

"You, chief, have made yourself a terror on the Red Gulch trails. I came here to hunt you down, and nothing but capture or death shall turn me from my sworn duty."

Cherokee Charlie laughed bitterly.

"So be it, then!" he exclaimed. "You have virtually signed your own death-warrant, for no one of you shall leave that dug-out alive!"

Then he turned and hurried back to his men, while Raymond, pale but determined, re-entered the dug-out.

Ruggles greeted him with a nod of approval, saying:

"That's the talk, chief! We've got the beggars guessing, and they'll never be able to drive us out of here."

"Now, if we could tear that door off its hinges and set it on edge crossways, it and the jambs would give us shelter from which to command all approaches from the front, while Murat looked after the window in the rear."

"You are right, Ruggles. We'll do it."

In another minute the door was down, and each man quickly dropped into position.

Just in time were these simple preparations completed. A hoarse, guttural rang out, quickly followed by the crash of a volley from the outlaws' rifles, and a storm of bullets rained about the dug-out, splintering the stave door in places.

Protected by the solid jambs between them and their foes, the marshal and his deputy, confident that a rush would soon be made, patiently awaited their fire.

"They are coming now!" exclaimed Raymond, a moment later, as a force

burst of yells echoed through the timber. "Make every bullet count, Rugles!"

"Kneel there, and I will stand, for we must cross-fire to drive them back."

Then, partially screened by the heavy door and the solid jambs, the two officers opened a rapid fire.

At such close and deadly range, nearly every bullet told. The outlaws held gamely onward, then swerved aside and passed out of range.

An interval of silence followed, and Ruggles glanced anxiously at his chief, then spoke:

"What if they try the roof, chief?"

"It is of sapplings laid close together and covered with sod, and with their knives they can quickly cut holes through which to fire."

Marshal Raymond smiled grimly, and said:

"We'll still have an advantage, Ruggles, for we shall see them before they can see us."

"We have decidedly the best of it so far, and with food and water we can stand quite a siege."

"I believe they will draw off now, and play a waiting game, hoping to starve us into surrender. But the sounds of the heavy firing should have reached our men, and I confidently expect help within a few hours."

The deputy shook his head sagaciously.

"I'm afraid we can't build much on that," he remarked. "The men are doubtless pretty well scattered, and the nearest of them some miles from here. So, even if they hear the firing at all, and come, it will likely be in such straggling order as to create nothing more than a momentary diversion in our favor."

Raymond readily saw that this view of the case was correct, and his expressive face clouded. Grimly, he rejoined:

"Let it go at that, then! We're under cover—we can hold them off. Sooner or later, our plight will be discovered and help sent us. If that should fail—Well, we won't walk out, pardner!"

"We are in a bad box, men—that is certain," Murat gravely interposed. "But I see no reason why we should not all escape—barring death by a chance bullet while cooped up here."

"Let us hold them off till night, then I will go for help, and before morning dawns we can turn the tables."

"You will go for help!" echoed Raymond incredulously.

"So I said, sir."

"But pray explain—I do not understand."

"I mean, Marshal Raymond, that when night comes I will secretly leave the dug-out, go to Red Gulch, and return with help."

"That will be impossible, Murat!"

"Not at all, sir, if we are guarded; for I can slip through this window, creep up the slope, and steal through their lines undetected, I am sure."

"They will not know that I have gone or that your force is weakened, so will be chary of making another assault, for it is their game now to starve you out."

"But are you sure, Murat, that you can pass their lines undetected?"

"I will do it, sir, for discovery would mean death, and I care not to die with my mission unfulfilled."

"You must remember that I am an old mountain-man. For many years I was compelled almost daily to put my wits against the cunning of red-skins and outlaws alike, and I am, therefore, not a novice at the game I propose."

The deputy nodded quickly.

"I believe, chief, that Murat can work the trick," he declared, earnestly. "That he is a master of stealth and cunning, his escape from the Gold-Bar Palace should prove, while before us in the person of that wounded wretch is another evidence that he can slip through Cherokee Charlie's lines almost at will."

"So I say, let him have his way, for we have no right to hold him here."

"No, nor the right to tell him to go," the Marshal added, smiling quietly. "When night comes, if he is of the same mind, he may go."

Murat stroked his long beard reflectively. He seemed to be thinking deeply, and at last broke the silence, saying: "I will go, pards, as soon as night falls, for I must get through their lines before the moon rises."

"But there is a possibility you must make me, and one which you must keep at any hazard."

"You must pledge yourselves to write down all that Lumper may utter during my absence; and, if he rouses get a confession from him if possible."

"Will you do it?"

"We will," earnestly declared the two officers, in one voice.

Then the three men resumed their position, and in almost unbroken silence the day wore slowly away.

That the outlaws lingered near, as was attested by an occasional volley, and all realized that the situation was most desperate.

When night had fallen, Murat gripped the hands of each of his friends, slipped through the small window and silently disappeared.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

DICK DOBOIS'S DISCOVERY.

When Orrville Dubois turned from the Grayson cottage, his heart was hot with rage, embittered by chagrin and disappointment, and he was fully determined to seek revenge as a salve for his wounded vanity.

Straight to the Gold-Bar Palace he stalked, and sought his gambler-friend, John June.

"June, I am in trouble—you must help me!" he exclaimed, in a low, intense voice, as he grasped the hand of the gambler. "Come—can't we talk in private?"

"To be sure," the little sport responded, his keen, steely-blue eyes flashing a swift glance over the perturbed face of the lawyer. "Right this way, old fellow. There's no charge for admittance, and—Hull square against a snag, I reckon, pardner?"

"Just that! But I'll cut loose and swing off, or—"

"Easy, now, pardner! Don't promise to be rash—it don't pay!"

"But here we are. Walk right in and camp. You can speak your little piece without fear or favor, for we're in private now, for sure!"

June had led the way into a small room in the rear of the gambling den. Now, he closed the door and seated himself opposite to the lawyer.

For a moment Dubois did not speak. His brows were knitted in a savage scowl, and he drummed angrily on the table with his fingers.

"You're in pecks o' trouble, pardner?"

"Curse it! yes. I've been flung aside in the Grayson case. The whole thing has gone to smash so far as I am concerned."

"Because of—just what, now?"

Again Dubois scowled. Then he told of his reception by Agatha Grayson, holding back no part of that brief but decisive interview at the cottage.

June nodded vehemently.

"You made a bad play, pardner," he observed. "I told you to let drink alone, for if ever a man needed his head you did to-day, with things in the awful snarl they are!"

"But the mischief is done, now; it can't be undone, and there is not a particle of use to kick."

"Yes, I reckon the tanglefoot did it," Dubois gloomily assented. "I lost my head for a moment, and in attempting to screen my accursed cowardice, made matters tenfold worse."

"But Agatha Grayson shall repent her words—on that point I am bitterly determined!"

"Surely, you'd not stoop to war with a woman!"

"Just that—no less!" vigorously. "You

once pledged me your help, John June, and I am here now to exact my pound of flesh!"

The gambler's steely-blue eyes glittered vividly. A faint smile of scorn curled his thin, firm lips.

"To be sure!" he exclaimed, smoothly. "But—Will you have the kindness to explain?"

"In brief—yes. The girl has got to marry me!"

"Whew! You are crowding the mourners, now! You forget that I am neither matrimonial agent nor parson."

"I forget nothing, June!—not even your promise. Be serious, now, and listen to me."

"If I fail to marry that girl I am ruined."

"Financially?"

"Yes. I am deeply involved, and came here fully determined to win her hand. I must do it. Her fortune will save me."

June's overhanging brows contracted ominously, and he gazed searchingly at the lawyer's face.

"Nick Judd, you are mad!" he exclaimed, coldly. "That girl is as far above you as the stars of heaven are above the worms of earth! She is as pure, as spotless, as an angel; while you—" A short, bitter laugh completed the sentence.

Dubois flushed angrily, then grew pale. His lips parted wolfishly.

"Don't address me by that name!" he gritted, in a tone of menace. "You forget that my past is buried—that it is not to be resurrected."

"Now listen to me: I have sworn to make that girl my wife—to break her proud spirit. I need your help. It was pledged to me upon your word of honor. I demand that you keep that pledge."

"Will you do it?"

"No, sir, I will not, Nick Judd," was the stern reply. "It is true that you saved my life at the risk of your own, and that I pledged myself to be of service to you if it ever fell within my power."

"But I did not contemplate dishonorable action in that pledge, and I now decline to perform the service you would exact of me."

"Promise to let Miss Grayson alone—to leave the camp, and to attempt to work no harm to her, and I will gladly save you from your threatened ruin, for of gold I have plenty."

"Thus will I keep my pledge, Nick Judd, but not in the way you would now demand."

An oath came from the lawyer's lips, and he sprang to his feet—only to shrink quickly into his chair! A revolver gleamed in June's hand, and his grimly determined face disclosed his purpose.

"You would kill me!" gasped Dubois, in a terrified voice.

"As I would a heel-snapping cur, Nick Judd! You do not deserve to live!"

"You are hard with me, John June! You compel me to accept your terms."

"You deserve harsh treatment, sir."

"But name your price, and let us end this scene."

"I need twelve thousand dollars now, and must have ten thousand more in three months."

"You shall have it, and glad am I to discharge in gold the debt I owe you," and the little gambler's voice bespoke intense relief.

"You swear to leave Red Gulch on the first stage, and to return no more?"

"I do."

"Come, then, and the money is yours."

June put up the pistol and led the way into the barroom, where he excused himself a moment. When he returned, he placed a thick package of bills in the lawyer's hands.

"Count it, and write me a receipt," he placidly requested.

Dubois obeyed, and a moment later the men parted.

"Fool!" breathed the lawyer, as he strode out into the street. "You have armed my hands to accomplish my purpose! I shall not leave Red Gulch until Agatha Grayson is a beggar!"

It is needless to follow the cunning Dubois step by step. Let it answer that he sought a barber and had his luxurious beard removed, then purchased and donned a full suit of sombre black.

The change in his appearance was startling, and he felt that with care he could remain in Red Gulch indefinitely without danger of recognition by the Gold-Bar Sport or Agatha Grayson.

During the afternoon, he learned by cautious inquiry that Stamm was absent from the Gulch, and that Elephant Eph had changed his quarters from the Gold-Bar Palace to Sailor Jack's Haven, and he determined to seek the Giant Gambler there that night.

Accordingly, shortly after nightfall he set out from the low dive in which he had secured lodging, and made his way in the direction of the Haven.

The moon had risen, and he strode leisurely along, busy with the villainous plot he was forming. As he neared the calaboose, an approaching form suddenly shrank into the shadows, and stared at his smoothly shaven face with fear-distended eyes. Then came a quick gasp of relief, and forth on the calm night air rang the hoarse words:

"Great powers! Nicodemus Judd, is it you?"

Startled beyond measure by that abrupt hail, the rascally lawyer recoiled, and his hand dropped swiftly to a weapon. Ere he could draw it from his belt, a firm grasp closed upon his wrist, and Dick Dodds, the ex-deputy, stared sharply into his face.

"Speak!" he exclaimed, sternly. "Are you not Nicodemus Judd?"

"I am!" was the faltered response.

"Thank heaven! I am no murderer! No crime can be laid at my door!"

"Let Alex. Stamm beware, for I am now his enemy, and free to act!"

Hurling the lawyer roughly aside, Dick Dodds turned and with long leaps sped rapidly down the street.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

A STRANGE FUEL.

Dazed by his encounter with Dodds, Dubois shrank against the wall of a building near by, and brushed his hand sharply across his eyes.

"Ugh!" he shuddered, with a violent tremor. "I remember now! His knife once sought my heart!"

"Curse the blind folly that led me to shave! Better by far had I remained under cover and hired a tool to do my will!"

"I must use care, for there is one other to whom my face will bring a thirst for vengeance, and for aught I know he, too, may be here!"

Rallying, then, with a wonderful effort, the lawyer glanced apprehensively in the direction Dodds had fled, and with quickened steps resumed his course.

Arrived at the Haven, he boldly entered and in seeming carelessness glanced over the crowd. A fairly accurate description of Elephant Eph had been given him, and he felt assured he could not miss his man.

Surely, in a camp no larger than Red Gulch two such men as Elephant Eph could hardly be found, and when his eyes fell upon a tall and ponderous form at the bar, bedecked in gray corduroy, with gray cowboy hat and frilled white shirt, Dubois knew that his brief search was ended.

Yet, he hesitated. The Giant Gambler's face was bruised and discolored, and his lowering brows bespoke an ill-humor.

Then, with a muttered oath, the gambler spun a glistening double-eagle along the rough bar, and in a boisterous tone invited the crowd to "come up."

Moving forward with the others, the lawyer slipped in beside the Giant Gambler, and touched him lightly on the arm.

"I beg your pardon," he exclaimed, suavely. "But—are you not Elephant Eph?"

The gambler turned his head, flashed a swift look of inquiry at that smoothly shaven face, and gruffly responded:

"That is my handle, stranger."

"My name is Dubois. Until to-day I had the honor to be the legal representative of the Grayson heirs."

"Never heard of you."

"No, I suppose not. Yet, you are no stranger to me. I am hunting Judge Stamm, and thought perhaps you could give me information."

"The judge is out of town."

"And has he no representative with whom I can do business? Mind you, I have been thrown over by the Graysons, and have information of value for him."

The lawyer's voice had sunk almost to a whisper, and Elephant Eph again looked keenly into his face.

That which he read there must have assured him that Dubois was a thorough villain, for his sombre visage brightened, and in a confidential tone he replied:

"Wait here, then, with me. Sim. Paullly, the Rainbow book-keeper, will be here shortly, and you can talk to him."

At that moment Sailor Jake handed the gambler his change, and as he thrust it into his capacious pocket Elephant Eph drew the lawyer away from the bar and led him to a distant table.

"We can sit here and talk without danger of being overheard," he assured.

"Provided—you can prove your words, I reckon?"

"I've got the papers, hard and fast."

"They should talk, surely! But I'm puzzled, pard. I don't see the reason for your sudden conversion to Stamm's interest."

"Yet there's cause enough. I traveled two thousand miles, then was turned down the day I reached camp. I want revenge."

"And a share of the booty?"

"Assuredly."

Elephant Eph pondered a moment.

"I can't deal with you direct, pard. But I know Stamm will let you in on the trick if what you say is true."

"But Stamm is out of town," Dubois rejoined. "It is necessary for me to act quickly. I am in danger here."

"So-ho? Well, don't worry. The judge has set up a blind. He will be here to-night."

The two men talked for some time. Then Simon Paullly appeared, and Elephant Eph speedily made him acquainted with the lawyer's wishes.

"Stamm will treat with you," the book-keeper assured. "You may rest easy on that score."

Over an hour passed before Stamm and the road-agent, both thoroughly disguised, entered the place. Dubois had grown uneasy, and was on the point of leaving when they were discovered approaching the table.

Acting as master of ceremonies, Elephant Eph introduced Dubois to the judge and his companion, and in a guarded voice explained the lawyer's errand.

The road-agent had started violently when his eyes first rested upon the face of Dubois, but he repressed his agitation and coolly joined in the conversation that followed.

But a few minutes had gone by when Elephant Eph detected Goldspur in the room, and the plot to get rid of the sport was quickly hatched.

"You must take part in this affair, Dubois," Stamm declared. "We have no positive evidence as yet that you are sincere, and your action now shall decide whether or not we are to trust you."

Listening intently until they heard Goldspur's body alight with a splash in the whirlpool beneath the cliff, Stamm and his allies drew back from the verge and silently hastened toward the camp.

At a point near the bridge they stopped for a moment ere separating, and Stamm spoke to Paullly.

"Eph has selected a number of men to-day, and they will be on hand in the morning, say, at the new men."

"Let off such members of the force as you do not know we can absolutely rely on, and put in the new men."

"And if Miss Grayson objects?"

"Tell her you are acting under my or-

ders; that as manager of the mine I desire the changes to be made."

Paullly agreed, and after a few words around the party separated.

Dubois started toward the bridge, and the road-agent chief walked beside him. They crossed together. Just as the lawyer stepped off into the street, Cherokee deftly drew a revolver, and in a stern voice exclaimed:

"Halt, and throw up your hands, Nick Judd!"

"Don't utter a sound—don't stir an inch, or I'll let the moonlight through your thick head!"

Utterly paralyzed with fear, Dubois mutely obeyed. His clean-shaven face gleamed white and ghastly in the moonlight, and he trembled visibly.

"You don't know me now, Nick Judd, but I know you," the road-agent continued, in chilling tones, while his dark eyes flashed with ire.

"Turn squarely around, and lower your hands. Keep them at your side, but where I can see them. There—that will do. Now, forward—march!"

Straight up the street walked Dubois, with the road-agent just three paces behind him, until they had passed the confines of the camp, when Cherokee ordered a turn to the left.

Fifteen minutes later, both men entered a beautiful glade, an acre or so in extent. It was covered with a thick, velvety greensward, and was free of undergrowth.

When near the center of this glade, the outlaw ordered a halt, and addressed his captive, saying:

"I did not know you, Nick Judd, when you were my captive at the cavern yesterday, or all the gold of Montana would not have purchased you a chance of escape."

"Look upon me—know me as I am—as Charles Middleton, the man whose life your devilish cunning wrecked."

"An honest man, I was sent forth a fugitive, branded as a thief. Hounded as I have been, is it any wonder that at last I have fallen?"

"I swore that it should be your life or mine if we ever met, and Fate has dealt me one kindly stroke in bringing us together thus."

"You are armed. Step off there five paces, with your hands up. I will retreat a like distance and count one—two—three. At the word 'one' you may draw; when 'three' is spoken, you may fire."

A gleam of hope shot athwart Dubois's haggard face, and he silently stepped off the prescribed distance, and turned.

Middleton had retreated, and stood silent and motionless.

Then in a sternly ringing voice came the words:

"Make ready, now!"

"One—two—three!"

Crack! The weapons of the foes exploded together. Middleton's pistol slipped from his nerveless hand. He flung his arms aloft, turned half around, and pitched heavily to the ground.

Uttering an exultant laugh, Dubois leaped past his fallen foe and hurried toward the camp.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE MAYOR RETURNS.

Justus Jarrett waited long and patiently for the appearance of Hercules Redrock. He was sorely puzzled by the delay, but just as he concluded that something had certainly gone amiss in Goldspur's plans, the delegate from Brimstone Butte strolled leisurely into the Gold-Bar saloon.

"Evenin', Justus," greeted the bearded sport, with an unctuous bow. "I hopes I see ye feelin' better than y' was to-day. Har-har!"

"You do, indeed, friend Redrock! I feel like a new man, and life has a new tinge taken on a roseate tinge."

"Thet is good—mighty good, my an' I'm glad ter hear et. Et teache we should never say die, but keep on kickin'."

"But now we'll quit this hyar morall-

in' an' come right down ter ther hardpan o' business.

"I reckon thet my friend Goldspur explained es how thar was a leetle trick he wanted you an' me ter work ter-night?"

"Oh, yes. I was instructed to come here and await your appearance, and to obey your orders.

"But I want to thank you right now for your good offices in securing me this position just at the time when I so sorely needed it."

"Thet's all right, Justus, an' jest putt thet ten back in yer pocket. I reckon ye ain't none too flush yet, an' I ain't a-needin'."

"Now, you camp right hyar an' wait, while I circulate a bit an' see how things aire a-pannin'."

Without waiting a response the eccentric sport moved away, and a moment later was lost to view in the crowd.

That he had a certain well-defined purpose in view, however, was attested by the precision with which he moved. Passing quickly from the barroom into the gambling den, he spoke to John June, and quietly drew him aside.

"Murat, thet Mad Miner, is in camp," he tersely announced. "He brings word thet Raymond an' one of his deputies is corrilled in a deserted dug-out back in ther hills, an' needs help.

"Can ye get a few good men tergether an' send them out?"

"I can and will, if I can find a guide."

"Murat will lead them."

"Where is he?"

"Under kiver—good an' strong, but ready ter start at any minute."

"That is well. Keep him there. I will secure the men, and hunt up Red Harper, the camp marshal, to command them. If all goes smoothly, they will be ready to start inside of an hour."

"Good! Quick work will count. But keep the expedition secret, if possible."

June nodded significantly, and at once set to work to pick his men.

Drawing aside, Hercules Redrock sat down at a vacant table, and in seeming idleness watched the crowd. But his cunning brain was busy.

Presently, a man, a tall, powerful fellow, dressed as a miner, came forward and in a cautious tone addressed him, saying, simply:

"I come from Gold Dick."

Redrock gazed keenly at the speaker. Evidently he was pleased with the man's appearance, for after a moment he nodded approvingly, smiled, and pleasantly asked:

"What is your name?"

"Fenton Duval."

"Do you know, Mr. Duval, what we want with you?"

"I do not, sir, but Gold Dick assured me that it was an honest man's job, at good pay, an' thet et wouldn't interfere with my regular work in ther Rainbow mine."

"He told yer ther truth, Duval, but he might have added et would give ye a big chance ter do some tall fightin'."

"I are not fer danger ef I'm paid well an' ther job's square."

"Ye'll do, then, fer we aire lookin' fer men ter defend ther Rainbow Mine a'g'in jumpers."

Duval started.

"In ther interest o' Stamm or ther Graysons?" he asked, quickly.

"Ther Graysons."

"I'll sign, then, an' without extra pay."

Redrock then explained, in part, the move in contemplation, cautioned Duval to remain silent, and dismissed him, pending Gold Dick's arrival.

In the course of an hour an even dozen men presented themselves at the table in much the same manner, coming one by one, and each addressed the sport with that same terse announcement:

"I came from Gold Dick!"

In each case, Redrock studied the man carefully for a moment, then questioned him, and ended by accepting his services.

Truly, the twelve did credit to the miner-detective's judgment, and as the

red-bearded sport recalled each face he felt confident of success.

Shortly after the twelfth man had stepped away from the table, Gold Dick appeared and sat down opposite to the sport, saying:

"I hes sent ther men to you, Pard Redrock, as Goldspur said I should, an' now I am ready fer orders."

"A splendid crew you have picked, too, Dick, an' with them we should sart'inly win."

"Have them go arm themselves thoroughly, an' meet at their Rainbow stockade, whar I'll jine ye before mornin' with ther keys ter ther gate."

"Use caution, now, so thet none may suspect we're actin' in concert, or thet a move of any kind is on foot."

Dick nodded comprehensively, and rose.

"I un'erstand ye, pard, an' we'll all be shy as mices," he returned. "So-long, now."

Redrock responded, and the miner-detective moved briskly away, just as John June approached.

"Red Harper and his men are ready," the gambler announced. "If Murat is to guide them—"

"He'll do jest that, pard," cut in the delegate from Brimstone Butte, almost curtly. "Tell Harper ter keep right down ther crick till he comes ter ther broken rocks on this side o' ther big whirlpool. Murat is hidin' thar, an' will come out when he hears 'Gabriel' jerked out three times, short an' sweet."

June reflected a moment, and was about to speak, when a quick gesture from Redrock warned him to remain silent. The next minute, Jubal Strong touched him on the shoulder.

The mayor was pale and haggard. His strong face was blood-stained, and a bandage was bound tightly around his head.

For a single fleeting second the gambler regarded him with surprise, then warmly grasped his hand.

"Welcome, mayor!" he exclaimed. "You have had a brush with the outlaws, I see."

"Yes. We visited the Hermit Miner's claim in search of Miss Grayson, but they declared she had not been there. Later, we separated, to beat through the hills, and in thinking the matter over I again became suspicious, and returned alone. I watched the place for some hours, and the actions of the men convinced me they were not honest miners."

"Late in the afternoon I was discovered and fired upon, and we had a regular pitched battle, with the result that both fled wounded, while I was left with an ugly scalp wound to remind me of the trouble."

"When they had gone, I searched the place thoroughly, and turned up evidence enough to convince me that the claim is only a blind, set up to hide one of Cherokee Charlie's dens."

Mayor Strong spoke slowly, and in some agitation. Redrock's eyes never left his face, and there was a puzzled look in their shrewd, blue depths.

"It is unfortunate, mayor, that you were wounded, and that, too, when Miss Grayson had escaped and was safe in Red Gulch."

"That report is true, then?"

"Perfectly true, mayor."

"I heard it a moment ago, but hardly credited it."

"Con Grayson, I suppose, has not been heard from?"

"No, the mystery surrounding his disappearance is as deep and dark as ever."

The mayor pondered a moment.

"There is foul play at the bottom of it," he declared. "I am fully convinced of that. I came here to find Goldspur, for I believe that he can sift the secret—if he will."

"It has been some hours since I saw the sport, and I do not think he's around."

Jubal Strong turned away, and for a moment was lost to view.

true. The Dandy Sport was nowhere visible.

Redrock rose and walked away. At the barroom door he was met by Trumps, the Miner.

"I've had trouble striking ther trail," the latter explained, guardedly. "Ther gang had left ther Haven when I got thar, an' I jest found ther critter."

"Whar is he?"

"At his cabin."

"Come, then! We'll act at once."

Beckoning to Jarrett to follow, Hercules Redrock hurried out into the street.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE RAID BEGUN.

Penurious to the last degree, Simeon Paully lived alone in a small cabin on the outskirts of the camp. He served as his own cook and housekeeper, and report said that he fared on the cheapest and poorest food.

That, however, was Simeon's own affair, and the masculine gossips of Red Gulch might possibly have spared him many a merciless excoiation but for the petty niggardliness which he publicly displayed in dealing with the tradesmen of the camp.

When the Rainbow Rogues separated after hurling Gilbert Goldspur over the cliff and into the whirlpool, Simeon was shaking nervously, and he found it necessary to walk about awhile to wear away the ominous, soul-chilling tremors agitating him.

He knew that without complete physical exhaustion there would be no sleep for him for many hours to come. The savage assault upon Con Grayson weighed heavily on his conscience, alternating with a secret fear that the youth might possibly have escaped, in some mysterious way, to return, later, athirst for revenge.

So Simeon Paully strode moodily about, the hapless victim of his own evil deeds, until completely tired out, then bent his steps homeward, entered his cabin and carefully locked the door.

Lighting a lamp, he turned the wick low, and flung himself, fully dressed, on a narrow cot in the corner.

"I'm getting squeamish!" he growled. "But, like the others, I've gotten into this affair too deeply to draw out, and must push through, or go down."

He passed his hand wearily over his brow, twisted uneasily, and stared at the dim light. So, the minutes dragged slowly, until a half-hour had elapsed, when his eyes closed in uneasy slumber.

But Simeon Paully was not to sleep undisturbed. Scarcely had the heavy lids shut down over those dull, greenish-blue orbs, when a heavy knocking on the door jarred the cabin and brought him to his feet.

His face paled, and a startled look flashed from his eyes. Turning up the light, he grasped his revolver and slowly approached the door.

"Who is there?" he demanded.

"Stamm!" was the muffled response. "Open quick, you donkey! I'm in a hurry!"

Never doubting that the Rainbow manager stood without, so close an imitation was that voice, the bookkeeper hastily unlocked and flung open the door.

Hercules Redrock sprang into the cabin, closely followed by Trumps and Jarrett.

"Easy, now," warned the red-bearded sport, promptly swinging his pistol-armed hand to a level. "Don't act a fool!"

"This is an outrage!" fumed Paully, slowly retreating. If you fellows mean robbery, you've come to the wrong place. I have nothin'!"

Redrock chuckled.

"Har-har!" he laughed. "We ain't no robbers!"

"I arrest you, Sim Paully! You are my prisoner!"

The blood rushed to Simeon's face, and as quickly receded, leaving him whiter than ever. He trembled violently. Then, his natural effrontery came to his aid,

and he plucked up a bold front and angrily demanded:

"Who are you, to talk of arrestin'?"

"Jest ther same ole Herc, f'm Brimstone."

"I understand that. I've heard of you. You're a wretched sport—a rascally knave, travelin' from camp to camp; in short, a swindler. You've got no license to talk of arrestin'!"

A peculiar grin lurked around Redrock's mouth, but he coolly replied:

"Oh, yas; I have. I hold a commission as an under-sheriff for this county, an' I arrest you on ther charge o' murder!"

"Murder!"

"Yes. You are charged with killing Conrad Grayson."

With a wailing cry of terror and despair Simeon Pauly shrank back, and fell on the cot.

"Close ther door, Trumps, an' stand guard," Redrock ordered.

"Jarrett, help me disarm an' search ther critter. He seems knocked out shore an' nacherel."

Pauly was indeed unconscious. With deft hands the two men searched his pockets, placing everything taken therefrom upon a table near the cot.

That task completed, Redrock snapped handcuffs on the prisoner, and left the work of resuscitation to Jarrett.

Among the various articles taken from Pauly's pockets were several keys, a memorandum book and a number of papers. Seating himself beside the table, Redrock gave the documents a careful inspection.

Under Jarrett's rude but effective ministrations, the bookkeeper quickly rallied. A few dashes of cold water brought him to a sitting posture, gasping and sputtering. As he cleared the water from his eyes, he started violently and glared angrily at Redrock.

"Those are my papers," he expostulated, vehemently. "Let them alone. You have no business with them."

"You are mistaken. I have business with them. You aire charged with murder, remember, an' I b'lieve thet some o' these hyar papers may establish ther motive fer ther crime."

"I also infers, f'm the contents o' this hyar book, thet ye aire a member o' ther Rainbow Rogues."

Pauly shrank back.

"I—I do not understand you," he stammered.

"Oh, yas, ye do," was the cool assurance.

"Then, too, I sees by a check hyar fer a hundred dollars, thet ye hev bin in on Stamm's leetle game o' robbin' ther Graysons."

"The check is for salary."

"Et's dated day afore yistiddy. Thet wasn't pay-day."

"No; I got it as an advance. I wanted to buy a bisickle. I didn't have the money."

A complacent smile stole over Redrock's bearded face, and he asked, abruptly:

"A beeseckle, eh? Whar aire ther Rainbow books?"

"They were in the safe. It was taken from the ruins of the office to-day, and placed in the toolhouse at the mine. It hasn't been opened since the fire; but as it was fire-proof, the books must be intact."

"However, they will do you no good. They are perfectly straight, and I'm willin' to go over them with you and Miss Grayson at any time."

"We'll leave thet job fer an expert, Mr. Pauly."

Simeon's thin lips curled scornfully.

"Do as you please, of course, Mr. Redrock. Your words imply that you regard Stamm and myself as rogues. I can assure you that were we as guilty as you seem to suspect we are, you'd find us entirely too cunnin' to be caught with a bad set of books on our hands."

"We shall see—we shall see," coolly responded the red-bearded sport, and then he placed the various articles in his pockets and prepared to quit the cabin.

A moment later Simeon passed out between Jarrett and Trumps, whereupon Redrock extinguished the light and followed, locking the door.

Then the little party walked rapidly in the direction of the Rainbow stockade. Near the bridge a brief halt was made, and Jarrett shrank into the shadows with the captive, while Redrock and Trumps crossed the bridge and turned toward the calaboose.

Arrived at the building, the sport drew a key from his pocket and unlocked the door.

"You'll remain hyar, Trumps, an' act as jailor until some trustworthy man is appointed, fer Shocky Pete is in hoc," he explained, and he handed the miner the key.

"If any galoot comes round axin' questions before the grand smash comes, you kin say that Shocky was called away, an' thet you were left in charge."

Then he unlocked the cell-room door, and ordered Shocky Pete to come out. The captive jailor obeyed with alacrity, and in another minute Trumps was alone.

With a firm grip on the arm of his prisoner, Redrock retraced his steps to the point where Jarrett was in waiting, and the march to the stockade was resumed.

A dozen shadowy forms were clustered near the gate, under cover of the wall, and as a faint signal rang out Gold Dick stepped forth to meet the sport.

"We're all hyar, pard, an' waitin'," he declared with a grin of delight, as he beheld the plight of Pauly and Shocky Pete. "An' nary a galoot hev we seen."

Redrock tersely expressed his satisfaction, and handed Dick the keys taken from Pauly, saying:

"Hyar aire ther keys ter ther gate an' ther mine buildin's, pard. I putt them in yer hand, an' leaves ye in charge. Let no one enter without the password."

"Hyar, too, aire ther prisoners. Guard them well and see thet they do not escape."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

A GAME OF DRAW.

Locking arms with his companion as they walked along, Redrock in a few terse sentences laid out the work ahead—nothing less than the capture of Elephant Eph.

Soon they entered the Haven.

A straggler or two stood at the bar, while toward the rear of the room three men were seated around a table, engaged in a game of draw poker.

Elephant Eph was one of the trio.

These facts Redrock discerned at a glance. He addressed Jarrett in an undertone, and strolled on toward the gamblers.

At that juncture one of the players threw down his hand in disgust, got up and walked out of the place.

"Har-har!" laughed the red-bearded sport. "I'll bet I kin do better'n thet."

Then, with clear artistic assurance, he sat down in the vacant chair and drew a roll of bills from his pocket.

The Giant Gambler gazed keenly at the delegate from Brimstone.

"Git a good squint while ye're a-gittin', mister," Redrock coolly requested. "Et don't cost a cent, an'—time's no object!"

Elephant Eph flushed hot under that pointed bit of badinage, and his gaze wavered and fell.

"I beg your pardon!" he coolly replied after a moment. "You are Hercules Redrock, I believe?"

"Shore an' nacherel!"

"That, my dear fellow, must explain my rudeness! I've heard a great deal of you in the past four-and-twenty hours, and—could I help looking, then?"

"Har-har! I reckon not, Johnny! But deal ther cards. I'm hungry ter ante."

Nodding curtly, the Giant Gambler deftly shuffled the pack, and the game began.

The keen eyes of Redrock were not idle, and when the first hand had been

dealt he made a discovery that brought a scornful curl to his bearded lips.

The cards were marked!

Not only that, but the system employed was one which he was an adept in reading!

When a half-hour had gone by he felt fairly confident that he held the Giant Gambler at his mercy.

The third player was a Jew, Moses Levy, by name. He was one of the solid business men of the camp, but as soon as the pace became hot he gave up his chair and departed.

"Shall we continue the play?" asked Eph curtly.

"Sart'in. I've got pecks o' scads ter lose—ef you kin win 'em!"

Several hands followed, and Elephant Eph continued to lose steadily and heavily. At length, there came a jack-pot, and for several successive deals both men failed to open it. Then Redrock dealt the cards. When the Giant Gambler looked at his hand, he found that he had received three aces, a king and a queen.

A glance at the back of the top card of the marked pack showed him that it was another king, and he promptly opened the pot, betting fifty dollars.

Much to his secret satisfaction, Redrock "saw" his bet, and raised him a hundred.

"You must have caught a pair yourself," sneered the giant, shoving two hundred and fifty dollars forward.

"I ain't bobbin'," was the sententious rejoinder, and Redrock counted off and placed a roll of bills in the centre of the table, saying:

"Three hundred an' fifty more."

"I'll raise that five hundred."

The man from Brimstone Butte scratched his head and reflected a moment. Then he dropped five crisp new bills in the pot and picked up the pack.

The Giant Gambler discarded the queen.

"I'll draw one card," he announced.

"Uh-huh! I don't want any," Redrock declared.

Then the betting began, and it ran high.

Neither man appeared willing to "call." After some minutes of lively betting, Elephant Eph arose, opened his vest and drew a heavy money-belt from around his body.

Loosing the stout draw-string, he poured the contents of the belt into his hat, then carefully counted the money and shoved it into the centre of the table.

"Five thousand even—and the last dollar I have in the world!" he announced, in a hoarse voice. "Cover it, sport, if you will; but, mark my words: If you win that pot, I shall kill you before you can leave the table!"

He drew a revolver and laid it before him.

Redrock looked up. His blue eyes flashed with contempt.

"You aire a bluffer—ye'll do nothin' o' ther kind," he returned, coldly.

Then he counted out the amount necessary to call the bet, and flung it in the pot.

"Show your hand!" he ordered sternly.

Smiling grimly, Elephant Eph obeyed, exposing three aces and a pair of kings. "I have four deuces," Redrock declared, and he turned the cards face-up on the table.

A bitter curse came from the Giant Gambler.

"Steady!" warned Redrock, in cool and even tones, his right hand, pistol armed in the twinkling of an eye, rising above the table. "Don't touch that gun! Don't move—don't utter a sound!"

"I want you for the murder of Con Grayson! Resist, and I will blow your brains out!"

Not loudly, but in strains of intense and deadly earnestness came those words and the stern visage and gleaming eyes of the sport, betrayed a fixed determination to keep his promise!

Elephant Eph read as much in one swift glance, and the last vestige of color

left his face when Redrock seized the revolver and placed it beyond his reach.

That done, with his free hand, the sport drew the money to him, thrust it into his capacious pockets, and rose to his feet.

During this proceeding a low whistle sounded in the rear of The Haven. It was the signal agreed upon between Redrock and Jarrett, and indicated that the way was clear.

"You are to go with me," the sport continued, in the same cold, metallic voice, "Turn and walk slowly through the rear door. Keep your hands down, but in plain view. Now—forward!"

The Giant Gambler's massive chest swelled with fierce anger and resentment. But he was powerless.

Turning, he walked slowly out of The Haven. As he crossed the threshold a firm hand grasped his wrist and the cold muzzle of a pistol was pressed firmly against his temple.

"Steady, now!" cautioned Jarrett, calmly.

In another minute the gambler was securely handcuffed.

So quiet had been the affair throughout that Sailor Jake knew nothing of the arrest.

Just at daybreak Stamm, still disguised as a miner, walked quickly into The Haven and asked for Elephant Eph.

"I think he is in his room asleep," the bartender explained.

"Please send him down at once," said Stamm, dropping a gold piece on the bar.

The bribe was readily accepted. Pending the bartender's return, the Rainbow manager retreated to a table, sat down, and pulled a note from his pocket.

"I don't understand this," he muttered, with an uneasy frown. "It's not like him to run away."

The note was brief, and ran as follows:

"Stamm: Things are getting too hot for me, and I'm going while I have the chance. You, of course, can do as you please. PAULLY."

"It's in his handwriting, and I reckon he's skipped, sure enough," the rascal mused.

"Well, I'll talk to Eph, and go up to the mine with the boys to see what turns up. Then, Alexander Stamm must appear in person, called back by startling news from Red Gulch."

"And, by heavens! I'll make Paully's flight count, for if trouble comes he shall be the scapegoat—the one to be called to account for missing moneys and general crooked work!"

A moment later the bartender appeared.

"Eph is not in his room—has not been there to-night," he said.

A grim smile curled the manager's lips.

"Another recreant," he muttered, and he rose and left the place.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

MATTERS AT THE MINE.

Meanwhile, Hercules Redrock and his ally had carried the Giant Gambler straight to the Rainbow Mine, where he was securely confined in one of the small buildings near the adit.

"We must keep the rascals apart," Redrock observed, unconsciously lapsing from the phraseology of the mines, as had also happened during the scene at The Haven. "Separated, we may get a confession from one or the other."

Three of the men were then dispatched, under guidance of Gold Dick, to bring in Con Grayson and Darky Dan, and shortly before daybreak they arrived at the stockade.

The wounded youth had rallied wonderfully under the assiduous care of the miner detectives, while Darky Dan declared himself as good as new.

Redrock and Jarrett drew both men aside and engaged them in a brief but earnest conversation.

When this consultation had closed, the sport sought Gold Dick and said:

"Dick, ef ye aire not sleepy, I wish

ye'd go down ter camp an' keep eyes on Jubal Strong this forenoon.

"Ef he makes ary show o' leavin' let me know at once."

The miner nodded quickly.

"I'll do et," he returned.

So Gold Dick departed, and, after visiting the sentries placed at regular intervals along the stockade, Redrock sat down to await developments.

He was not kept in idleness long, for shortly after sunrise Jarrett came up from the gate with the information that a considerable number of men were approaching.

"I think they are coming to make trouble," he explained. "They are a rough, determined looking set, and every man seems to be armed."

"They may try ter git in," Redrock responded.

Then he got up, and with Jarrett walked down to the gate.

The approaching party was pushing rapidly up the slope, and when the sport looked through the gateway they were in plain view.

"They're a hard crowd, shore enough," he remarked. "They aire near enough, too, an' I will halt them."

"You may fetch ther men down, Jarrett."

As he uttered the words, Redrock stepped through the gate, and in a stern voice cried:

"Hold on, thar! You aire near enough! Stop right thar an' speak yer leetle piece!"

Thrown into confusion by that sudden hail, the approaching party halted and looked helplessly at one another.

Evidently, they were without a leader. Redrock smiled grimly.

"Say what ye want," he quickly continued, "then turn back, fer ther mine is shut down, an' no one will be admitted."

"Those o' you who've bin workin' hyar will draw wages fer lost time next payday, but none need report fer work till next Monday mornin'."

The men talked among thmselves a moment; then one of their number stepped forward and said:

"We wants ter see Sim Paully."

"Paully is not hyar; he is no longer connected with ther Rainbow."

A howl of incredulity greeted this statement.

"Too thin!" yelled one.

"He hired us last night!"

The self-appointed leader, none other than Stamm himself in disguise, turned angrily upon his followers.

"Be still, cain't ye?" he snarled. "Let me do ther talkin'!" Turning to the sport, the rascal continued:

"We come hyar to do business with Sim. Paully. You say he's not hyar. Now, who aire you?"

"Me? Why, I'm ther boss o' this hyar mine," the sport replied.

"I believe you've jumped ther Rainbow!"

"I hev—fer a mortal fact!"

"Miserable scoundrel! You shall pay dearly for this trick!" and Stamm, forgetting the part he was playing, shook his fists in anger.

"An' who'll collect?"

"Alexander Stamm!"

"Stamm? Bah! He's a wretched thief! He has run away."

Black with rage, the disguised manager turned to his followers.

"Et's no use, boys," he declared, sullenly. "We'll have ter let go till Stamm comes. Then we'll raise an army an' clean out this rascally gang."

A half-hearted cheer greeted the words. Then the troop turned and slowly descended the slope.

"Your turn next, Alex.—if I can only get the right grip," laughed Redrock softly.

Entering the stockade, he closed and locked the gate, spoke pleasantly to the men assembled by Jarrett, and passed on to the building in which Paully was confined.

He found the prisoner greatly downcast.

"You seem ter be feelin' extremely

bad, Mr. Paully," the sport remarked, as he seated himself.

"I do—I do indeed!" whimpered the wretch.

"You find yerself in a mighty bad box, hey?"

"Yes; but nothin' can be proved ag'in' me."

"Then what ails ye?"

"I—I don't like to say," whined the bookkeeper.

"I guess et's yer conscience. You killed Grayson, an' et bothers ye."

"They can't prove I killed him."

"That remains ter be seen."

"Elephant Eph did it."

Redrock arose, and moved toward the door.

"I cain't waste my time with ye, Paully," he exclaimed. "When ye come ter yer senses an' decide ter make a clean breast of et, I'll listen ter ye."

Springing forward, Simeon Paully clasped his manacled hands imploringly.

"Wait! wait!" he gasped. "Don't leave me here. Take me with you!"

"Cain't do et, Simeon. This is ther on'y den we hev fer ye. I must go."

"Don't! don't! I can't stay here with them!"

"With whom?"

"With Con and Darky Dan!"

"Man, you aire mad! They ain't hyar!"

"I saw them, I tell you!"

"You imagined ye did."

"No, I saw their ghosts! They came out of the cellar there, and pointed to me."

The sport gravely walked to an open trap in the corner, and peered down. Underneath the floor was a pit for storing the blasting materials used in the mine.

"Simeon, ye're in a bad box," he declared. "I would advise ye ter confess."

Paully's teeth chattered.

"I—I will!" he gasped. "I'll tell all I know."

Redrock slowly lowered the trap-door into place, and turned to the prisoner, saying:

"Stick ter thet determination, Simeon Paully, an' et may be ther better fer ye. We must hev a man, now, ter take down yer confession, an' witnesses."

"I'll have ther door open, an' mebbe ther spooks won't bother ye, for I've heer'd say they don't love daylight."

Leaving the door ajar, Redrock passed out of the toolhouse in search of Jarrett.

As he walked across the enclosure a complacent smile curled his bearded lips.

His cunningly-planned ruse had been successful!

CHAPTER XXXIX.

STAMM APPEARS.

When Redrock had reached a point near the center of the enclosure, the stockade gate was suddenly flung open to admit Daddy Parker, with Agatha Grayson upon his arm.

At sight of the Rainbow heiress, the sport stood quite still for a moment, and a pained look shone from his expressive eyes. Then he shook himself roughly and continued toward the gate.

"Good-morning, Mr. Redrock," greeted Daddy Parker, effusively, when the sport approached. "I perceive, sir, that you are in possession, just as I assured my niece here that you would be."

"Miss Grayson, Mr. Hercules Redrock."

"Agatha, dear, Mr. Redrock is the gentleman I have placed in charge of the Rainbow."

The sport acknowledged the introduction with a formal bow, then tersely explained the situation, in part.

"I cain't tell ye all, jest yit," he said, frankly. "Thar be some things that will surprise ye very much, Miss Grayson, but et might spoil my leetle game ter make them known right now."

"Thar has bin a reg'lar band at work, known among themselves as ther Rainbow Rogues, with Stamm as ther master-speerit. But we cain't prove thet jest yet, so 'least said, soonest mended."

"Let be, thet we hev three o' ther critters in hoc, an' so aire in a fa'r way ter git a confession thet will throw ther hull

deal open, when I think we kin win out with hands down.

"Sim Pauly, ther bookkeeper, was one o' ther rascals we nabbed. From papers found on him I kalkilate thar hes bin a reg'lar robbers' game goin' on at ther mine, an' I'd like ter hev ther books examined."

Agatha assented readily.

"It is that very business that brings me here this morning," she averred. "I have long suspected Stamm and Pauly of being in collusion, but have never been able to discover anything from a personal inspection of the books."

"My uncle informs me that among your men is an expert bookkeeper, and has suggested his employment. I came to see if I could engage him."

Redrock at once excused himself and hurried away in search of Jarrett, whom he found with the men at the gate.

Explaining what was wanted, the sport turned and retraced his steps to the building in which Pauly was confined.

The prisoner had rallied partially, but was yet extremely nervous.

"I'm not quite ready ter heer ye, Pauly," the sport announced. "But ther men will be hyar presently."

"I shall be glad to have it done with."

"Thet is right. 'Twill ease yer conscience."

Meanwhile, Jarrett had approached Daddy Parker. The old man greeted him warmly, and at once presented him to Agatha.

Then a faint flush suffused the girl's face, and she exclaimed:

"Justus Jarrett! Is it possible!"

"Assuredly, Miss Grayson," laughed Jarrett. "But I, too, am surprised! I had not dreamed that you were the Rainbow heiress."

Agatha turned to her uncle.

"Mr. Jarrett and myself were schoolmates only a few years ago," she explained. "I had lost sight of him until now."

"Well, well! How queerly things do turn out!"

For some little time the trio indulged in general talk, then Agatha abruptly led back to the main subject.

"I shall be glad to accept the position," Jarrett declared, frankly.

An agreement was quickly reached, and then Daddy Parker and Agatha departed.

"By George! What a splendid girl she has grown to be," mused Jarrett, as he gazed through the gate at the receding figures. "And Stamm, the scoundrel, was robbing her!"

"I was glad to enlist in her cause before I knew who she was, but now—Heaven bless Goldspur!"

Turning reluctantly from the gate, he started toward the toolhouse, but was recalled by a sharp hail from one of the men.

"Stamm is comin' up the slope, an' he's in full war-paint," the fellow sang out.

Redrock, advancing to meet Jarrett, heard the words, and quickened his steps.

"We'll meet him at ther gate," he said, taking Jarrett by the arm. "Pauly has weakened, an' is ready ter confess ef we kin keep him f'm sight or hearin' o' ther head-devil."

Stamm was not long in appearing. He came up the slope with quick strides. Acting upon Redrock's orders, the man at the gate promptly admitted him.

With a hasty glance around the enclosure, Stamm singled out the sport and confronted him.

"Your name is Redrock, I believe?" he exclaimed, in a blustering tone.

"Hercules Redrock, I'm Brimstone Butte—you bet!" was the cool response.

"Well, I am Alexander Stamm. I am the manager here, and I understand you have jumped this claim."

"Yes, sir—et's jumped. Har—har!"

"How dared you do that?"

"I acted on Miss Grayson's orders."

Stamm scowled viciously.

"I don't believe that," he declared,

curtly. "Above all things, Miss Grayson is honorable. She knows she has no right to this mine, either morally or legally."

"Et was her father's, wasn't et?"

"Yes; but, under a clause in his will her share now becomes mine."

"Umph! I hadn't heer'd thet," the sport rejoined, smiling sardonically. "But her brother owns a hafe, don't he?"

"No; I have more than paid for his interest in the property in moneys advanced. He is a scapegoat—a thief!"

"These aire hard words, pardner!"

"No matter; they are true. When I went away, I left a thousand dollars in the Rainbow safe. I am prepared to prove that he robbed the safe, then burned the office to hide his crime."

"Ye surprise me!"

"I will do worse; I will crush you, if you don't immediately withdraw with these miserable ragamuffins."

"Thet would be rash, pardner," Redrock suggested, mildly. "Possession is nine points in law, ye know."

"The law will suit me," Stamm retorted, as he drew an official-looking document from his pocket and held it up to view. "I have filed a lien upon the mine. There is a Deputy Sheriff in Red Gulch now, Sheriff Peterson informed me, and I shall hunt him up at once and proceed to close. You fellows would better get out, or there'll be trouble."

"We'll chaine thet, Jedge Stamm, fer I am ther Deputy ye mean—Hercules Redrock!"

Stamm turned pale. His lips trembled, and he was about to speak, when, with a quick gesture, the sport warned him to remain silent.

"I'll tell ye somethin' about this business," Redrock continued, coolly. "You aire a miserable scoundrel, Stamm! A thief yerself, ye aire ther ally of thieves an' road-agents!"

"Ye've stolen over fifty thousand dollars o' ther Graysons' money. Ye've played in with Cherokee Charlie. Ye've turned ther shaft away from the richest ore, ter depreciate ther mine, so thar'd be no big fight when ye sprung yer leetle grab game."

"Ye've bin full o' pizen tricks, an' no deed hes bin too black fer ye ter plan. But—ye've danced yer jig!"

First red, then white, turned the recreant manager, and his black eyes gleamed venomously.

"It's all a lie, concocted by enemies to ruin me!" he yelled, brandishing his heavy fists savagely. "The books will show that I have never taken a dollar of the Graysons' money."

"Ther books—in ther safe—will show—nothin'!" was the significant retort. "They're bogus! Under the office ye hed a secret cellar. In the cellar wall was a secret safe. You know what I mean?"

"Curse you! No!"

"Very good; I'll be plain, then! In that safe ye kept ther real books of ther mine an' ther money ye were steadily embezzlin'. Does thet count?"

Stamm quailed, and for a moment was silent. Then he looked up, and in a cool and steady voice replied:

"You are speaking in riddles, man! But the matter shall be sifted to the bottom."

"Where is Pauly?"

"Don't you know?" laughed Redrock.

"He has fled, I suppose," exclaimed Stamm, with a dramatic gesture. "Curse him! But—"

Breaking off abruptly, the entrapped rascal shook his head threateningly, and walked through the open gate.

"Why didn't you arrest him?" demanded Jarrett, turning to Redrock, in surprise.

"To be honest, I'm not quite sure o' my game," he admitted. "I patched up a few hints let fall by Simeon Pauly, an'—thar ye aire!"

"But come! Git yer notebook an' pencil ready, an' we'll take enough of ther confession ter secure a warrant."

Then to the toolhouse the two men

went, and within a half hour Pauly's confession, in brief, had been written, signed, and witnessed.

"Now, we're fixed ter hold ther critter!" Redrock announced, and with Jarrett he prepared to go down to the camp.

At the gate they were met by Gold Dick, flushed and breathless.

"Quick! Thar's trouble in camp!" the miner-detective gasped. "They've got Strong!—they're goin' ter hang him!"

CHAPTER XL.

UNMASKED.

Orrville Dubois arose after a few hours' restless slumber, breakfasted, and strolled over to Sailor Jake's Haven, expecting to meet his allies.

Much to his surprise, none of them were to be seen.

"It is singular," he mused, glancing at his watch. "I was sure some of them would be here by this. I will walk about for an hour or so and familiarize myself with the camp while waiting, for such a knowledge may come in good play."

In his leisurely way he returned to the street and strolled out upon the rude bridge, where he paused and looked up and down Black Bear Creek uneasily.

Then he walked out upon the bank and hurried over the course he had followed the night before under cover of Middleton's revolver.

A few minutes later he was on the border of the glade. There he paused in the shadows of the timber and glanced uneasily across that smooth, open expanse.

"It's not there!" breathed Dubois in alarm. "Can it be—no, my ball surely sped true!"

Stealthily, then, he moved out into the glade, step by step, until he stood upon the spot where the outlaw had fallen.

"Yes, by heavens! there is a footprint, and on the grass is a tell-tale stain!" the lawyer muttered, excitedly, and, step by step, he followed the faint trail into the timber.

"He was wounded only, and has escaped! Those prints lead toward Red Gulch, so I must be upon my guard."

Greatly perturbed, Dubois turned back to the creek, and hastened into camp, where, to his intense surprise, he found everything in a whirl of excitement. A crowd was gathered in front of the Gold-Bar Palace, and the greatest confusion prevailed.

Addressing a miner, Dubois asked:

"What is the trouble, friend? What has happened?"

"Don't know," was the curt reply.

"Ther marshal hes come in with a dead man," answered another. "Ha! thar he comes now!"

True enough. United States Marshal Raymond had emerged from the doorway of the Gold-Bar Palace, and, stepping forward, he mounted a large box which some one had dragged into the street.

"Men of Red Gulch," shouted the marshal, "I request your closest attention. As is doubtless known to you, I have for several days past been engaged in a hunt for the notorious outlaw, Cherokee Charlie. Last night, through the timely arrival and heroic efforts of your local officer, Mr. Harper, I was enabled to step out of a veritable death-trap and raid the outlaw's stronghold."

"We captured a number of the band, but Cherokee himself was absent. From one of his men, who was dying, we learned that the chief was in Red Gulch in disguise, and it is my belief that he is here yet."

"I now request that you quietly separate and form a picket line around the camp, while a thorough search is made. Let no man pass the line until he has given an account of himself."

A hoarse yell rose from the crowd, which then broke and began to fall away.

Dubois had listened attentively. He turned away with a breath of relief as the marshal ceased speaking, and began pushing through the crowd.

Suddenly, he came face to face with Jubal Strong!

The mayor's head was tightly bandaged, his face haggard.

A gleam of terror flashed over the lawyer's countenance; then a sort of desperate courage arose within him, and he yelled fiercely:

"There he is! *There he is!* That is Cherokee Charlie!"

The crowd turned and closed up quickly.

Strong turned quite pale and shrank back. He well understood that he was in deadly danger.

"You are mistaken!" he asserted, in a voice that trembled. "I am not Cherokee Charlie. I am the mayor of this camp."

Some one uttered a derisive yell. The crowd became restless, and faint murmurings of doubt and distrust began to be heard.

Pointing an accusing hand at the mayor, Dubois swept the surrounding faces with his flashing eyes.

"That is the man, gentlemen—that is Cherokee Charlie! Don't I know? Wasn't I a captive in his mountain den for days? I escaped only yesterday, and—*there he stands!*"

At that moment Raymond appeared in the circle surrounding the two men.

"You are Orrville Dubois?" he asked, abruptly.

"I am Orrville Dubois!"

"By heavens! Strong, the testimony of this man looks black for you, for surely he should know!"

"Surrender yourself into my hands until the matter is sifted—"

"To be lynched by a lawless mob? No!" interrupted Jubal Strong. But a dozen hands gripped the luckless mayor, and in a moment he was a prisoner.

"A rope! A rope! We'll hang him!"

A hundred furious cries jarred the air. Raymond, struggling desperately to reach and protect the prisoner, was dashed aside and left bruised and bleeding in the rear.

Straight toward a number of trees on the creek bank at the foot of the Rainbow Slope, surged the mob, and in an incredibly short time they were within the cool shadows.

A noosed lariat was quickly thrown over the branch of a tree.

"Steady, you fools!" snarled Alex. Stamm, springing forward. "Give me the rope. I will place it! I am—"

A strong hand clutched his throat, shutting off the sentence and hurling him backward. Then, with a tigerish leap, Hercules Redrock alighted fairly between the prisoner and his captors!

The sport's face was pale—his eyes gleamed with indignant fury.

"Are you mad—crazy? This man is no outlaw—nor is he a dog, that the life should be strangled out of him!" he enunciated in a voice of almost chilling calmness. "Why should you seek his life?"

"He is Cherokee Charlie!" yelled Dubois, wild with rage. "Curse you for a meddler! Can't you see—"

A mocking laugh rang loudly through the timber, checking that frantic outburst. The lawyer whirled around. His face blanched, and a scream of terror burst from his quivering lips.

From a clump of undergrowth a man had stepped, and now stood feebly leaning against a tree, pistol in hand.

In face and in form, he was the exact counterpart of Jubal Strong!

A murmur of profound astonishment ran through the throng of Gulchites, as that strange and almost fatal resemblance flashed upon them. Then:

"Draw, Nick Judd, for once again do I give you a chance for life!" and, before a hand could be lifted in intervention, a double report rang out.

Dubois pitched forward upon his face, shot through the heart!

Reeling blindly, Middleton cast his smoking weapon aside, and sank to his knees, crying:

"To death alone do I surrender!"

"Gentlemen, you need look no further for Cherokee Charlie, *for I am he!*"

In another minute he fell forward. The last spark of life had fled; the outlaw was silent in death!

Moving forward, the men of Red Gulch gazed at the victims of that impromptu duel, until aroused from their semi-stupor by the sounds of a desperate struggle close at hand.

Stamm had engaged Hercules Redrock in combat!

Locked in a close embrace, the foes whirled here and there, each struggling gamely for the mastery.

Shifting quickly, the sport secured a favorite hold. In another breath, the mine manager rose in the air, to fall heavily upon his head and shoulders, and he lay motionless, a senseless heap.

In the struggle Redrock's long and fiery beard and hair had been torn away, and when he turned to the crowd a wild cheer rang out!

The delegate from Brimstone Butte stood revealed as—Gilbert Goldspur, the Dandy Sport!

CHAPTER XLI.

CONCLUSION.

Goldspur owed his escape from the whirlpool beneath the cliff to Dick Dodds and Murat, the Mad Miner. Both men had witnessed that stirring scene upon the cliff, and at the risk of their lives had fished the then senseless sport from the seething waters.

Moses Lumper had died in the dug-out during Murat's absence, but Marshal Raymond succeeded in getting his ante-mortem statement, and it, with the confession of Simeon Pauly and the testimony of Dick Dodds, cleared away all the mystery connected with the Rainbow Mine, and established Murat's identity as Gabriel Grayson.

The Mad Miner lived but a few weeks. The Rainbow Rogues had scarcely received their desserts when he was laid away in the Red Gulch cemetery.

Con Grayson had learned a life-lesson in his brief experience with Stamm, and developed into a steady and reliable business man. He became manager of the Rainbow Mine, and among his most trusted employees were Gold-Dick, Trumps, and Darky Dan, the erstwhile miner-detectives.

Jubal Strong became silent and moody and finally sold his business and left Red Gulch, going none knew where. Some said that his narrow escape from lynching had affected his brain. However that may have been, it is certain that his departure occurred just one day prior to the marriage of Agatha Grayson to Justus Jarrett.

Mrs. Helen Middleton did not long survive her unfortunate husband, and her death was closely followed by that of Daddy Parker and his estimable wife.

Of the other characters in our story little need be said, if we except Goldspur.

The citizens of the camp urged him to make Red Gulch his abiding place, but in vain.

Shaking his head, he replied:

"No; I thank you. I was cut out for a roving blade, and a roving blade I shall ever be!"

And as soon as the Rainbow Rogues had been brought to justice, he departed in search of "fresh diggings."

He was given a royal send-off, for all wished godspeed and abundant success to the Dandy Sport.

THE END.

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